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Authentic Fictions and Aesthetic Histories: the Problem of *The Poems of Ossian* in the Writing of Scottish History, 1760-1814

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Abstract

This dissertation will explore the influence of *The Poems of Ossian* and the subsequent Ossianic debate on Scottish historical writing—in both fiction and non-fiction— between the publication of *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* in 1760 up to the publication of *Waverley* in 1814. *Fragments*, and the two subsequent Ossianic volumes *Fingal* (1762) and *Temora* (1763), precipitated fierce debate on the value, interpretation, and manufacture of historical authority and authenticity. In particular, this dissertation will examine how *The Poems of Ossian* impacted the interpretation and re-evaluation of historical authority (what type of artefacts count as authentic artefacts?), authenticity (how do we determine what artefacts provide the most accurate picture of the times?), and genre (how do we write a history that is authentic and authorial?). The time period chosen, 1760-1814, will follow this debate from the origins of the Ossianic controversy through to the publication of Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley*, seen by some as the first true historical novel.

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Note on the Text

To avoid confusion between Ossian the bard and *Ossian* the text, *The Poems of Ossian* will be used as a short title to encompass the entirety of the Ossianic translations. *Fragments*, *Fingal*, and *Temora* will be used as short titles when referencing the respective individual books.

Introduction

'Among savage nations, poetry is always the first vehicle of history.'[1] So wrote William Forbes Skene in an 1837 book published for The Highland Society of London. For Skene, the epitome of the poet-historian was the bard Ossian, who just over seventy-five years before had been introduced to the English-speaking world through James Macpherson's productions of *The Poems of Ossian*.[2] That in 1837 *The Poems of Ossian* would persist within historiography is surprising considering its controversial claims of an ancient Scottish bardic tradition. For Skene, Ossian was the preeminent poet-historian. For many others, particularly those writing in the first decades after the Ossianic controversy, this was not so simple a matter.

This dissertation will explore the impact of *The Poems of Ossian* and the subsequent Ossianic debate on Scottish historical writing—in both fiction and non-fiction— between the publication of *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* in 1760 up to the publication of *Waverley* in 1814. *Fragments*, and the two subsequent Ossianic volumes *Fingal* (1762) and *Temora* (1763), precipitated fierce debate on the value, interpretation, and manufacture of historical authority and authenticity. The fragile boundaries between historical and literary genres were further exposed as *The Poems of Ossian* became a literary phenomenon that raged throughout Europe and North America.

Yet the legacy of *The Poems of Ossian* has been marred by its supposed inauthenticity. Macpherson claimed *The Poems of Ossian* derived from a uniquely Scottish source of the Fionn and Cù Chulainn cycles, familiar to Irish lore, yet the accuracy of Macpherson's claims is still subject to great debate. One of the most damning claims against Macpherson was that he could never produce the ancient manuscripts he was purported to have copied from; however, disagreements arise from whether or not Macpherson ever claimed to have textual sources.[3] Rather, Macpherson may have fancied himself a collector of oral tradition as he was known to maintain a collection of recorded Gaelic verse when he worked as a schoolteacher at Ruthven.[4] Much of the reputation of *The Poems of Ossian* has been shaped by its enthusiastic reception in Edinburgh by what

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[1] William F. Skene, *The Highlanders of Scotland, their Origin, History and Antiquities*, Vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1837), p. 206.

[2] Ibid, p. 215.

[3] Derrick Thomson, 'James Macpherson: The Gaelic Dimension' in *From Gaelic to Romantic: Ossianic Translations,* ed. by Fiona Stafford and Howard Gaskill, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 17-26 (pp. 20-21).

[4] Fiona J. Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: A Study of James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), pp. 40-1.

Richard Sher calls a 'cabal' of mostly Moderate Whigs and literati, including Hugh Blair, Adam Ferguson, and John Home.[5] Macpherson's work enshrined the epic traditions of Gaelic Scotland in a format that would ensure its preservation; he purposefully adopted techniques that allowed him to aggrandise the oral practices of Scotland while conserving them within a literary medium. The reception of these works, however, places the works in a historiographical context that struggled to reconcile the alleged antiquity of the poems with their modern pathos and nostalgia.

One reason that *The Poems of Ossian* may have proved so controversial is that they flouted the stadialist norms of history that were concurrently developing alongside the Ossianic phenomenon. Stadial history—as first outlined by Adam Smith and later adopted by a range of writers including Hugh Blair, John Millar, and Adam Ferguson— maintained that all cultures progressed along a linear set of four stages: hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and commerce.[6] Oral traditions, such as the kind that marked Gaelic culture and defined the origins of *The Poems of Ossian*, were seen as imperfect and primitive forms of transmission compared to literature, which was a feature of more advanced stages. *The Poems of Ossian*, with its modern sensibility intermixed with primitive scenery, was incompatible with this model. According to these theories of sequential histories, if *The Poems of Ossian* were as ancient as claimed, it would be inconceivable that it could produce the sensitive pathos perceived as belonging to a superior stage. Furthermore, this theory was often applied to explain why the Highland clans of Scotland appeared to be at a separate stage of civilisation than the Lowlands. Although the unrestrained sublime passion of the poetry was generally considered to fit within the scheme of primitive poetry, critics of the poems, including David Hume and Malcolm Laing, disagreed with the idea that a people still considered to be primitive in the eighteenth century were capable of such calculated sentimentality.[7] Conceding that *The Poems of Ossian* could derive from an authentic ancient Scottish origin, as exclusively and authentically preserved through oral tradition, would undermine the institutionalised historical authorities of the day.

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[5] Richard Sher, '"Those Scotch Imposters and their Cabal": Ossian and the Scottish Enlightenment', *Man and Nature / L'homme et la nature*, 1 (1982), pp. 55-63 (p. 55).

[6] Originally proposed during Smith's lectures at the University of Glasgow in the 1762-3 session. See Adam Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence,* eds. by R. L. Meek, D.D. Raphael, and P.G. Stein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 14-36. See also Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Historical Age of the Historical Nation,* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), p. 84.

[7] John Dwyer, 'The Melancholy Savage: Text and Context in the *Poems of Ossian,* in *Ossian Revisited,* ed. by Howard Gaskill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp. 164-206 (pp. 166-7).

Despite the mixed reception from the literati, the popularity of *The Poems of Ossian* meant that the ideas contained within it were leaking into popular thought. *The Poems of Ossian* fulfilled the emerging taste of sublime literature in the mid-eighteenth century, and its ancient sensibility corroborated theories about the natural state of man.[8] As *The Poems of Ossian* were believed to have been composed within the earliest stage of society, Ossian's bardic lays represented the purest source of artistic genius, as uncorrupted by modern society. In addition, antiquarian research latched onto the romantic primitivism of *The Poems of Ossian* as a glimpse into the earliest eras of Scottish history. Incorporating Ossianic sublime motifs into their writing, these antiquarians crafted a history that was founded as much in aesthetic authority as historical.

As this dissertation will show, *The Poems of Ossian* penetrated the Scottish consciousness through its impact on Scottish historical writing. The genre of 'history' underwent a significant development in terms of its both its genre and its conceptions of authenticity and historical authority. In many ways, 'history', as a genre, had major overlaps with the literary realm. Writers of history employed literary motifs in their construction of the past, just as literary writers would construct frameworks of discovery and retrieval to add a veil of authority to otherwise fictitious works.

Due to the debate surrounding its origins and its far-reaching popularity across Europe, *The Poems of Ossian* became entrenched in historical debates of the day. Both rejection and acceptance of *The Poems of Ossian* would influence contemporary constructions of the past, and the manifestation of history within the poems would affect perceptions of it beyond the literary text. This dissertation will explore how those themes penetrated various schools of thought, including Enlightenment-era stadialism, romantic antiquarianism, and novels. In doing so, this dissertation will demonstrate that *The Poems of Ossian* posed major challenges to the *status quo* of historical thought in the late eighteenth-century and forced writers to reconsider how history was perceived, retrieved, and constructed.

(Re-)Writing History

The evolution of the genre of history in the late eighteenth-century is fraught with overlapping boundaries of form, content, and style. While there is significant scholarship on the Enlightenment interpretations of history, historiography concerning the

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[8] John Vladimir Price, 'Ossian and the Canon in the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Ossian Revisited*, pp. 109-128, (pp. 110-13).

epistemological debates after the 1780s and until the early 1800s is bare. Recent years, however, have seen a surge of interest in antiquarianism during this period.[9] Many of the attributes of historical writing in this period are difficult to define, so much so that some assert that it was absent altogether.[10] That is not necessarily true, although histories written in this period adhere to problematic, sometimes slippery boundaries and are often conflated with separate movements.

One of the primary investigations of this dissertation will be the reconsideration of genre in the period following *The Poems of Ossian*. *The Poems of Ossian* were claimed as both a literary production and a historical artefact. At the same time, it completely rejected contemporary paradigms of what constituted literature and history. Where poetry had been, in the neoclassical period, associated with strict meter and rigid rhyme, *The Poems of Ossian* adopted a prose form with no clearly identifiable meter or rhyme. Where histories were based on textual authority of surviving manuscripts, *The Poems of Ossian* at best derived from an oral tradition that invested both supernatural foresight and historical supremacy into the role of the bard. By synthesising these elements, Macpherson unwittingly caused contention within the academy regarding the forms, structures, and sources of historical belief. *The Poems of Ossian* were, as Maureen McLane calls it, the 'inaugural test-case for the problematics of poiesis', which she defines as the 'relation of literary poetry to phantasised or "collected" orality […] or the use of poetry as evidence in cultural or historical argument.'[11] If this is the case, *The Poems of Ossian* simultaneously catalysed an inverse reaction as well, wherein historical authority began to pervade the literary establishment by necessitating a literary historiography of genre building, elements which are most apparent in the foundation of the national tale and historical novel.

This dissertation will examine the close relationship between history and literature in this period by probing the question of how historical texts can be read as literary documents and how a literary text, such as *The Poems of Ossian*, can contribute to the popular construction of history. This idea of collective memory, as first explored by

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[9] See Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Clare O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations: Antiquarian Debate and Cultural Politics in Ireland, c. 1750-1800* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2004); and Angela Byrne, *Geographies of the Romantic North: Science, Antiquarianism, and Travel, 1790−1830,* (London: Palgrave, 2013).

[10] Ian Haywood, *The Making of History: A Study of the Literary Forgeries of James Macpherson and Thomas Chatterton in Relation to Eighteenth-Century Ideas of History and Fiction*, (London: Associated University Press, 1986), p. 15.

[11] Maureen N. McLane, *Balladeering, Minstrelsy, and the Making of British Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 2, 7.

Maurice Halbwachs, derives from the collective experiences of a society, religion, or social class.[12] These experiences arise not just from the occupation of the same physical space but through the simultaneous consumption of printed materials.[13] Genre was relevant within this popular sphere for, as Mikhail Bakhtin argues, the epic had declined in cultural relevance in favour of the more experimental novel.[14] History, as a genre, also competed with historicist novels, which regularly borrowed superficial historical settings for essentially modern plots.[15] Within this climate, *The Poems of Ossian* were a cultural behemoth throughout Europe.[16] These texts, regardless of associated genre, were disseminated through the Scottish consciousness, forever altering the internal perception of Scotland.

A Literary History of the *Poems of Ossian*

In his sixty years, James Macpherson occupied positions of translator, poet, historian, colonial adjutant, and landlord. Born in 1736 in Ruthven, Badenoch in Invernesshire, he was a Gaelic speaker with strong connections to the local clan structure. His father was first cousin to the local chief, Ewan Macpherson.[17] Macpherson's fateful interaction with Adam Ferguson led to his meeting with John Home in 1759. Home, after receiving a 'translation' of Gaelic verse by Macpherson, encouraged the young poet to publish his 'translations'.[18] The piece that Home saw may very well have been an invention of Macpherson's, but it led to the publication of *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760), the first of the Ossianic series.[19] *Fragments* quickly collected a dedicated cohort of supporters, both in Scotland and abroad. These included Hugh Blair, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Thomas Jefferson, and others. *Fingal* (1761/62) and *Temora* (1763) followed. Almost immediately following the publication of *Fragments*, their authenticity would be challenged, and the debate would last well after Macpherson's death in 1796.[20] Between

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[12] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 38-40.
[13] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 37-46.
[14] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,* trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 14.
[15] Margaret Russett, *Fictions and Fakes: Forging Romantic Authenticity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 14.
[16] Paul Barnaby, 'Timeline: European Reception of Ossian', in *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*, ed. Howard Gaskill, (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. xxi-lxviii.
[17] Stafford, *The Sublime Savage,* p. 12.
[18] Dafydd Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance in James Macpherson's* The Poems of Ossian, (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2003), p. 22.
[19] Ibid, p. 23.
[20] Stafford, *The Sublime Savage*, p. 2.

1804 and 1807, Malcolm Laing, the Highland Society of Scotland, and the Highland Society of London all published reports on the subject of its authenticity.[21] Sir Walter Scott grappled with the question in his youth.[22] In the nineteenth century, Matthew Arnold, Ernest Renan, and William Skene would all probe the authenticity question, and while debate had died down in the beginning of the twentieth-century, it has been, in the last thirty years, reinvigorated by the likes of Fiona Stafford, Howard Gaskill, Dafydd Moore, and Donald Meek. This recent scholarship has helped not only restore critical attention to what Hazlitt called one of the 'four principal works of poetry in the world' but to examine the work beyond its notoriety.[23]

For all that *The Poems of Ossian* had wide-reaching influence throughout Europe, this dissertation will focus on the cultural impact through Scotland, specifically by analysing its influence on the writing of Scottish history. In some ways, *The Poems of Ossian* were simply an early realisation of cultural theories proposed in the 1750s. The 1750s witnessed the introduction of both Edward Burke's concept of the sublime and Jean Jacques Rousseau's notion of the natural man. The wide reception of these works created an environment ripe for their expression in artwork. With its stormy supernatural landscape and supposed origins in ancient oral traditions, *The Poems of Ossian* fulfilled the expectations of these philosophies in numerous ways.

The Poems of Ossian also played on the undecided nature of Scottish identity in this period. Malcolm Laing, as early as 1804, saw the poems as an attempt for the Scottish to compete culturally with the English in post-Union Britain.[24] Today, many scholars have proposed Jacobite readings of the text. In a post-Union and post-Jacobite Scotland, modern dilemmas of Scottish identity were starting to take root within society. David Hume

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[21] Malcolm Laing, 'Dissertation on the Supposed Authenticity of Ossian's Poems' in *The History of Scotland: From the Union of the Crowns on the Accession of James VI. to the Throne of England, to the Union of the Kingdoms in the Reign of Queen Anne* Vol. 4. (Edinburgh: Mawman, 1804), p. 409; Malcolm Laing, ed. *The Poems of Ossian : &c. Containing the Poetical Works of James Macpherson, esq.* (Edinburgh: A. Constable, 1805); Henry MacKenzie, ed. *Report of the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland Appointed to Inquire Into the Nature and Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: A. Constable, 1805); John Sinclair, *The Poems of Ossian in the Original Gaelic…Together with a Dissertation on the Authenticity of the Poems,* (London: Highland Society of London, 1807).

[22] See Scott's letter to Anna Seward in Herbert Grierson, ed. *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott (*London: Constable, 1932-37*),* Vol 1. p. 319. Discussed in Chapter Four.

[23] William Hazlitt, 'On Poetry in General', in *Hazlitt on English Literature: An Introduction to the Appreciation of Literature,* ed. Jacob Zeitlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913), p. 271.

[24] 'The origin of the poems may be distinctly traced on awakening from a long lethargy that succeeded the union, the Scots, with their national ardour, sprung forwards industry and commerce and began to vie with the English in every literary pursuit.' Laing, *History of Scotland*, p. 433.

famously hired an editor to remove 'Scotticisms' from his work, and James Boswell nearly obsesses over Samuel Johnson's Scotophobia in his *Life of Samuel Johnson*.[25] As *The Poems of Ossian*'s sublimity and sentimentality are often construed as a rejection of Enlightenment style, so too are concepts of identity and time taken as a statement of Scotland's own identity crisis. The prevalence of burning oaks is sometimes seen as an indication of Jacobite sympathy within the poems, as oaks were a symbol of the rebellion in the Highlands.[26] According to Stafford, the Forty-Five exposed the fragility of Highland culture to Macpherson.[27] Porter too argues that Macpherson's childhood during the Forty-Five made him 'conscious of the effect of the Anglicisation and commerce were having on the Highlands.'[28] Kidd describes *The Poems of Ossian* as 'a coded elegy for the heroic Highlands of [Macpherson's] youth.'[29] Juxtaposed with Oscar's death, such themes have larger connotations for the post-Jacobite nation of Scotland. If a generation dies out without passing on their 'song'—if Gaelic culture submits to Anglo-norms—then Scotland dies as a nation. Ossian's status as 'last of his race' posits him at the same junction between the heroic past and uncertain future that Macpherson himself faced, and this motif carries a subversive subtext challenging the Anglicised authority of the Lowlands as custodians of Scotland's history.

Yet Jacobite interpretations must be handled with caution. The reliance on instances from Macpherson's youth ignore the politics of his adulthood. Leith Davis insists that Macpherson was not so subversive, as seen through his attempts to historicise the British nation as a coherent entity in his later works.[30] Nick Groom, who warns against 'finding a Jacobite in every acorn cup', traces oak imagery back to classical sources, where oaks and rocks represented a natural source of information as prophetic entities themselves.[31] Groom's interpretation lies in the Socratic association between nature and the Muses, the Muses being the daughters of Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory. The

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[25] For Hume and James Beattie's fear of 'Scotticisms', see Charles Jones, *The Edinburgh History of the Scots Language* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 337.

[26] Murray Pittock, 'James Macpherson and the Jacobite Code', in *From Gaelic to Romantic*, pp. 41-50 (p. 45).

[27] Fiona Stafford, 'Introduction', in *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works,* ed. by Howard Gaskill, p. x.

[28] James Porter, 'Bring me the Head of James Macpherson: the Execution of Ossian and the Wellsprings of Folkloristic Discourse', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 111.454 (2001), pp. 396-435, (p. 399).

[29] Colin Kidd, 'The Rehabilitation of Scottish Jacobitism', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 77. 203 (1998), pp. 56-76, (p. 67).

[30] Leith Davis, *Acts of Union: Scotland and the Literary Negotiation of the British Nation, 1707-1832,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[31] Nick Groom, *The Forger's Shadow: How Forgery Changed the Course of Literature* (London: Picador, 2002), p. 125

oak also had ancient Celtic associations, particularly within Celtic Christianity, where oak groves provided the ideal hermitage for monks within the natural landscape of Ireland and Scotland.[32] Murray Pittock reconciles the ancient oak imagery with the modern by suggesting that the tree imagery is a temporal link between the druidic age of Fingal and the Whig patriots of the eighteenth century, further demonstrating that there is no consensus on the topic of oaks.[33]

Regardless of the Jacobite question, some degree of an awareness of decline of Gaelic culture can be assumed in *The Poems of Ossian*. They are a prototypical example of romantic nostalgic literature, with highly-stylised representations of glory coded in past endeavours and gloomy, doomed landscapes projected against the future. They also bear hallmarks of the upheaval and innovation of Gaelic literature following the failed rebellion, the Acts of Proscription, and the first of the clearances.[34] There are also some elements of *The Poems of Ossian* which belong to the genre of *aisling* (dream) poetry that was prevalent in the wake of the Jacobite Rebellions; these characteristics include the spectral elements of ghostly resurrection and the prophetic power invested in the bards.[35] As this dissertation will demonstrate, the Ossianic mode of history thus conducts a discourse between the past and future to cope with present turmoil.[36]

The Authenticity of *The Poems of Ossian* and What it Means for Scholars

Derek Thomson's influential monograph *The Gaelic Sources of Macpherson's 'Ossian'* proved that Macpherson worked closely with about fifteen known pre-1760 written sources of the poems.[37] There is also the a high probability that Macpherson did incorporate some works from oral tradition, as he and other contemporary collectors—among them John

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[32] Susan Power Britton, 'Oaks, Wolves and Love: Celtic Monks and Northern Forests', *Journal of Forest History,* 33.1 (1989), pp. 4-20 (p. 8).

[33] Pittock, 'Macpherson and the Jacobite Code', pp.44-5.

[34] See Derick S. Thomson, *Gaelic Poetry in the Eighteenth Century*, (Aberdeen: Association of Scottish Literary Studies, 1993), pp. vii-ix; also, John MacInnes, "Gaelic Poetry in the Nineteenth Century", *Dùthchas nan Gàidheal: Selected Essays of John MacInnes*, ed. Michael Newton, (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), pp. 359-61.

[35] See Joep Leerssen 'Ossianic Liminality: Between Native Tradition and Preromantic Taste', *In From Gaelic to Romantic: Ossianic Translations*, ed. Fiona J. Stafford and Howard Gaskill, pp.1-16. Note, the idea of a Scottish Gaelic *aisling* tradition is still debated. See Murray Pittock, 'The Jacobite Song: Was there a Scottish Aisling?' in *Crossing the Highland Line: Cross-Currents in Eighteenth-Century Scottish Writing*, ed. by Christopher MacLachlan, (Glasgow: Association of Scottish Literary Studies, 2009), pp 85-96.

[36] Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, p. 117.

[37] Derek Thomson, *The Gaelic Sources of Macpherson's 'Ossian'*, (Oliver and Boyd: Aberdeen, 1951).

Smith and Donald MacNicol—claimed.[38] What opponents of *The Poems of Ossian* argue is that this is not sufficient to call *The Poems of Ossian* authentic. Some, such as Hugh Trevor-Roper, argue that *The Poems of Ossian* were a pastiche of Irish poetry cobbled together to indulge Scottish national vanity.[39] Perhaps the most famous verdict in the Ossianic controversy, in 1805, the Highland Society of Scotland published a report saying that Macpherson had been 'filling in the chasms' from pieces of poetry that he had picked up in the Highlands. For many, 'filling in the chasms' is itself an act of forgery.[40] The main contention is that if Macpherson did not pull his epic from a single, textually-identifiable work, then it cannot be considered an authentic production. Such criticism perseveres to this day, with Thomas Curley most recently publishing a monograph excoriating Macpherson as a literary criminal.[41] What is most startling about modern criticisms of *The Poems of Ossian* are not that they are opposed to its authenticity but that they use its inauthenticity to dismiss *The Poems of Ossian* completely as a cultural, literary, and historical artefact.[42]

The complicated origins of *The Poems of Ossian*, as well as its difficult transition from an oral tradition into a literary one, challenge scholars to consider what type of historical 'authority' is required for an epic to be 'authentic.' Thomson admits that while Macpherson's translations are loose and involve the combination of two distinct epic cycles—that of Cù Chullain and the Fenian heroes—there is significant evidence to demonstrate that in some parts of his translations, he was closely following what sources were available.[43] Thomson acknowledges that Macpherson did take artistic license with the poems, in some places more strongly than others. This work has enabled a type of Ossianic revisionism, where critics, particularly in the last thirty years, have rescued the reputation of Ossian from its fraudulent connotations.

In this reading, *The Poems of Ossian are* not a direct translation but they are not a fake translation either. Fiona Stafford notes that '*Fingal* may not be a direct translation of Gaelic poems that had survived intact since the third century, but neither is it a "fake" or

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[38] Thomson, 'The Gaelic Dimension', pp. 24-5.

[39] Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Invention of Scotland: Myth and History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014 [2008]) pp. 106-7.

[40] MacKenzie, *Report of the Committee of the Highland,* p. 109.

[41] Thomas Curley, *Samuel Johnson, The Ossian Fraud, and the Celtic Revival in Great Britain and Ireland,* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2014).

[42] Curley goes so far as to state that by examining Macpherson's impact on the romantic movement, these so-called revisionists are 'shifting focus away from the pejorative charge of literary lying.'

[43] Thomson, *The Gaelic Sources of the Poems of Ossian*, p. 11.

"forgery", because of Macpherson's peculiar situation at the confluence of the very different cultures.'[44] Uwe Boker believes that Macpherson believed that translation required a return to the original, purest verse, and so his handling of the poetry—including his additions, linguistic imitations of Virgil and Milton, and idealisation of the Highlands—might have aspired to return to what Macpherson considered a more typically 'Highland-esque' rendering of the Fionn Cycle.[45] James Porter notes that, from a folklorist position, authenticity is nearly impossible to define as older notions of a pure tradition deriving from an unified, unchanging peasant culture have been abandoned in favour of a more fluid understanding of the complexities of oral practices.[46]

In an oral tradition, after all, even epic traditions spanning centuries are liable to change from generation to generation, from bard to bard, from recitation to recitation.[47] Scottish Gaelic was a mostly oral culture until well after Macpherson's death. The publication of the Gaelic Bible in 1801 was arguably the first major impetus to encourage the average Gael to learn to read in their own language.[48] Due to this, as Thomson has indicated, many of those who did collect and record ballads before Macpherson had many mistakes with their orthography, as they had never been formally instructed in writing their own language.[49] So not only was there mutation between oral performances but also degradations in the transfer between oral and literary record. This leaves many of the early sources of 'Ossianic poetry' open to contention. So while an argument can be made that *The Poems of Ossian* are 'inauthentic', that they are a forgery is harder to maintain. The works are essentially a synthesis of actual oral tradition and manufactured prose-poetry, and through this synthesis, they operate at the threshold between Highland and Lowland, memory and history, past and future.

Yet the authenticity scandal reveals interesting implications for determining the truth in a pre-archaeological academic establishment. First of all, it highlights the extensive

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[44] Fiona Stafford, 'Introduction', in *The Poems of Ossian*, ed. Howard Gaskill, p. xv.

[45] Uwe Boker, 'The Marketing of Macpherson: The International Book Trade and the first Phase of German Ossian Reception,' in *Ossian Revisited* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), ed. Howard Gaskill, pp. 73-93 (p. 74). See also Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p. 98.

[46] Porter, 'Bring Me the Head of Macpherson', p. 400.

[47] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*, (London: Routledge, 1982), p. 77.

[48] Donald E. Meek, 'The Pulpit and the Pen: Clergy, Orality, and Print in the Scottish Gaelic World', in *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain, 1500-1850*, ed. Adam Fox and Daniel R. Woolf (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2003), pp. 84-118 (p. 99).

[49] Thomson, *The Gaelic Sources of Macpherson,* p. 10.

reliance on textual authority over that of oral authority. The insistence from scholars to produce a written manuscript as a source dominates all other modes of determining authenticity. The idea of a written manuscript may have emerged from the existence of Macpherson's own transcripts of the oral verse that he collected.[50] Publicly, Macpherson himself maintained that these poems came from the oral tradition, although he tried in vain to include an 'original specimen' with *Temora*. Supporters of Macpherson also came forward with their own evidence. For example, James MacLagan claimed he gave Macpherson 13 poems from his own collection of oral verse.[51] Furthermore, several contemporaneous collectors of Gaelic verse demonstrate the efforts taken to preserve Gaelic poetry in this era. They include Jerome Stone ('Albin and the Daughter of Mey', 1756), Donald MacNicol (*Remarks on Dr. Samuel Johnson's Journey to the Hebrides,* 1779), and John Smith (*Sean Dana le Oisian, Orran, Ulann, &c,* 1787).[52]

These debates also demonstrate the difficulty to define the parameters of authenticity. Nick Groom has described the ambiguity of fact and fiction within carefully guarded cultural beliefs:

> Forgery haunts cultures, spooking literature into disbelieving itself and throwing scholars and critics into curious fits because, like a secret told, forgery reveals the elusiveness of the mysterious ground on which fictions, stories, myths, poetry, and lies all dwell in varying measure.[53]

In this period in particular, the concept of authenticity is subject to constant re-evaluation. It is no longer sufficient to contain the debates of this period within binary representations of authentic and inauthentic. Therefore, this dissertation will deal primarily with a few separate if overlapping interpretations of 'authentic' history and the authorial apparatuses that were constructed to represent them. These include:

- Historiographical Authenticity: Authenticity derives from accessing primary sources from the historical period in question and interpreting these documents as an insight into the period.[54] (David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes,

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[50] Groom, *The Forger's Shadow*, pp. 111-2.

[51] Thomson, 'James Macpherson-The Gaelic Dimension', p. 18.

[52] Jerome Stone, 'Albin and the Daughter of Mey', *Scots Magazine* (1756); Donald MacNicol *Remarks On Dr. Samuel Johnson's Journey To The Hebrides* (London: T, Cadell, 1779); John Smith, *Sean dana le Oisian, Orran, Ulann, &c: Ancient Poems of Ossian, Orran, and Ullin, &c.* (Edinburgh: Charles Elliot, 1787).

[53] Groom, *The Forger's Shadow*, pp. 2-3.

[54] For a discussion on the problems of determining historiographical authenticity, see János M. Bak, Patrick J. Geary, and Gábor Klaniczay, 'The Long Shadow of Ossian', in *Manufacturing a Past for the Present: Forgery and Authenticity in Medievalist Texts and Objects in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Bak, Geary, and Klaniczay (Boston: Brill, 2015), p. xvi-xvii.

established the difference between a 'compiler' who collected primary sources and a 'historian' who interpreted them.)[55] Scotland faced an issue wherein a lack of chronicles and surviving documents from before the thirteenth century left large gaps in the historiography.[56]

- Romantic Authenticity: Authenticity referred to the natural state of man, a man who, unrestricted by the corrupting influence of society, could express himself in his own uninhibited terms.[57] Authenticity often correlated with the idea of 'genius', which was a highly personalised concept that owed itself more to experiential expression than textual authority.

- Moral Authenticity: Moral Philosophers, among them David Hume, believed that history's utility came in the instruction of morality by situating clear concepts of heroes and villains, good and evil, right and wrong. Historical authenticity then was a determination of moral truth.[58]

- Aesthetic Authenticity: Some, including Sir Walter Scott, may have followed an idea of aesthetic authenticity, wherein the goal of the historical is to regenerate and transmit the glory of a nation as encoded through creative endeavours meant to enhance the cultural value of the nation.[59]

These ideas will be discussed at length in this dissertation, which sets out not to solve the question of authenticity but probe its boundaries within a cultural and temporal framework. It is also important to note, as this dissertation goes on, that few works adhere exactly to one form of authenticity and may borrow from a wide range of expressions.

Mapping Authentic Fiction and Aesthetic History

This dissertation will map the evolving argument surrounding the boundaries between literature and history in the post-Ossianic period. The time period chosen, 1760-1814, will follow this debate from the origins of the Ossianic controversy through to the publication of Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley*, seen by some as the first true historical novel. The purpose

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[55] David Dalrymple, *Memorials and Letters Relating to the History of Britain in the Reign of James the First,* (Glasgow: R. and A. Foulis, 1766), p. 3. For further discussion, see Chapter Three.
[56] This gap in the historiography will be discussed in full in Chapters Two and Three.
[57] Margaret Russett, 'Genuity or Ingenuity? Invented Tradition and the Scottish Talent', in *Romanticism, Sincerity, and Authenticity,* eds. Tim Milnes and Kerry Sinanan (London: Palgrave, 2010), pp. 31-57 (p. 49).
[58] David Allan, *Virtue, Learning, and the Scottish Enlightenment: Ideas of Scholarship in Early Modern History (*Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993*)*, p. 61.
[59] Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 210.

of this trajectory, while neat in its framework, is not to simplify this debate but to underline the complexities in this period.

The first chapter will focus on *The Poems of Ossian* as a text. By considering *The Poems of Ossian* independently of their reception, the chapter will examine the poems' own constructions of history and cultural transmission. Macpherson published three separate volumes of *The Poems of Ossian*, and an evolution in style, content, and theme can be clearly seen over time.

The second chapter will explore the contemporary historical establishment of the Scottish Enlightenment, beginning with the late 1750s and moving on into the 1780s. It will compare and contrast the historical theories developed and maintained by various figures of the Enlightenment, both major and minor, with a primary focus on the rise of conjectural history. In doing so, it will be shown how *The Poems of Ossian* flouted historical trends by re-situating the instruction of history from its moral and legal purposes towards a re-established cultural inheritance.

Chapter Three will build on this foundation by examining the ways that Ossianism entered the Scottish consciousness through the historical genre. Romantic antiquarianism, with its incorporation of aesthetic history, often relied on *The Poems of Ossian* as a historical source. In doing so, many antiquarians reclaimed the value of oral tradition and expanded the boundaries of historical authority. In opposition to the Romantic school were the Gothicists, who outright rejected Ossian and in doing so crafted their own separate construction of 'history'. Yet despite their differences, as this chapter will show, taste moved towards a construction of history that was as literary as it was didactic. It will also demonstrate the contemporaneous trend of literary novels to use authorial frameworks of historical recovery to add a veil of 'authenticity' to their works as well as the increased adoption of poetry as a historical authority. .

Chapter Four will conclude this dissertation with an examination of Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* as both an Ossianic story and as the first historical novel. In comparing the two works, it will be shown where *Waverley* succeeded and *The Poems of Ossian* failed in cementing Scottish identity within a coherent historical framework. This is a discussion of genre as much as it is of the different expectations of authentic portrayal between the poems and the novel.

Through these chapters, this dissertation seeks to demonstrate the slippery and indistinct definitions of 'history' that defined historical writing during this period. It will show that the Ossianic phenomenon introduced more than a superficial Highland gloss on Scottish history, and that its very form challenged expectations of history both as a genre and as a social utility. This challenge was not easily dealt with by the Scottish establishment. While many interesting studies have been done on the impact of these writings on Britain and the Empire, this dissertation focuses internally on the local reception and response to the questions posed by *The Poems of Ossian* within the Scottish context. Rather than belonging to neatly cleaved binaries, the construction of Scottish history in this period involved to a spectrum of interpretations, manifestations, and theories. These new ideas of historical writing influenced a new perception of Scotland as a nation.

Chapter One: Tensions of Time and Form in *The Poems of Ossian*

In his critical study of 'eloquence' during the Scottish Enlightenment, Adam Potkay praises *The Poems of Ossian* as 'an ideal reconciliation of eighteenth-century oppositions.' Within this bardic figure, 'the passionate fierceness of the citizen- warrior blends with the delicate affections fostered by domesticity; pre-commercial civic virtue joins with modern manners; the traditional attributes of masculinity combine with those of femininity.'[1] While Potkay succeeds in intimating the constant ideological conflict within *The Poems of Ossian*, he does the poems a disservice by suggesting that their central tensions have been reconciled. More than just a set of compromised dichotomies, *The Poems of Ossian* demonstrate fluctuating and unrelenting tension between contradicting ideals. Rather than subsume these elements of *The Poems of Ossian* in boxes of 'reconciliation', *The Poems of Ossian* should be considered a modern text, struggling to come to terms with new theories of the world while maintaining strong links with the ancient. The poems both embrace Enlightenment ideals of classical authority and primitivism while rejecting staid theories of Celtic barbarism and textual superiority. They move between the worlds of bardic transmission and academic literacy, revelling in the ambiguity that they produce rather than aligning its disparities.

The Poems of Ossian demonstrate the delicate symbiosis of history within cultural narratives and the fragility of the respective mediums which preserve it. Ossian himself stands as a liminal hinge between the epic past and terminal future, his own present overshadowed as he struggles to process his role as 'last of his race'.[2] Ossian dwells in the past, which only enhances the awareness of the vacuity of the future, and in doing so, he conjures a stormy landscape that blurs the distinction between real and narrative time. By looking at *The Poems of Ossian* as a modern text, this chapter will demonstrate how Macpherson constructed historical time within a literary framework that aligned Gaelic tradition with the established literary canon. It will also examine how the text operates as an oral performance within a literary medium through the use of supernatural elements, paratextual details, and canonical allusions.

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[1] Adam Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 206.
[2] In the Preface to *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, Ossian is also referred to as 'last of the heroes'. See *The Poems of Ossian*, p. 5.

A Brief Note on the History of Literary Scholarship on *The Poems of Ossian*

The Poems of Ossian are a contentious text, if only because they refuse to conform to polarised binaries of primitive sensibility or modern sentimentalism. Many of Macpherson's supporters, most prominently Hugh Blair, saw the poems as representing the child-like genius of a primitive culture belonging to the earliest stages of society.[3] Henry Home, Lord Kames noted that 'every scene in *Ossian* relates to hunting, to fishing, and to love, the sole occupations of men, in the original state of society.'[4] Yet the incorporation of modern manners confused those who believed that Ossian's sentimental nostalgia could not manifest in a primitive society.

In the conflict between sensibility and sentimentality, sensibility, as an instinctual knowledge, had more primitive connotations than the consciously mediated sentimentalism.[5] The bardic figure of Ossian was one who was deeply in tune with his own internal spirit, an element of personal reflection that attracted antiquarians and yet divided stadialists. David Hume argued that the manners in *The Poems of Ossian* were so restrained, that typical violations of natural order—these being fantastical elements such as giants and magic—were lacking. According to him, these elements were definitive markers of early poetry. This omission meant *The Poems of Ossian* could not be a truly ancient text because 'manners are the only circumstances which a rude people cannot falsify; because they have no notion of any manners beside their own.'[6] The idea that Fingal and Ossian could demonstrate a modern self-reflexive awareness within primitive trappings was the first indication for many that *The Poems of Ossian* might have been inauthentic, and there are even those who would suggest that even with a partial foundation in true oral tradition, *The Poems of Ossian* were inauthentic because they diluted the ancient with the modern.[7]

Much of the confusion regarding Macpherson's literary prowess derives from dissension on the purpose and effect of the poems. There is still no consensus in this area. Some, including Jerome McGann, believe Macpherson's Highlands were an idealised

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[3] 'A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian,' in *The Poems of Ossian,* ed. Howard Gaskill, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 345.

[4] Henry Home, *Sketches of the History of Man: In Four Volumes*, (Dublin: James Williams, 1774), p. 62.

[5] Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 33. Sensibility relied on base intuitions to react to the world whereas sentimentalism deliberately channeled the resulting reactions to make emotive appeals towards moral ends. While the two are linked, the self-reflexive nature of sentimentalism placed it in a higher order of thinking than pure sensibility.

[6] David Hume, *Life and Correspondence of David Hume*, Vol' I, ed. John Hill Burton (Edinburgh: Royal Society of Edinburgh, 1846), p. 474.

[7] See the testimonies and accounts in John Sinclair, *An Account of the Highland Society of London, from its Establishment in in May 1773 to the Commencement of 1813* (London: R. McMillan, 1813), pp. 16-20.

picture that rejected progressive historical tenets and scoped a utopic position for man within his natural primitive form.[8] Others, such as Dafydd Moore and Katie Trumpener, see *The Poems of Ossian* as an elegy of Highland tradition, in scenes fraught with decay and nostalgia.[9] Colin Kidd argues that *The Poems of Ossian* 'projected a sympathetic picture of sensitive Gaels which appealed to the current fashion for the sentimental' but did little to disprove stadial theories of primitivism.[10] What Macpherson achieved in the poems is rather sophisticated, if often muddled, if only because he himself grappled with the place of the Scottish Highlands within both contemporary perception and its own historical development. What *The Poems of Ossian* represent then is not just a triumph of sentimental national politics or an artefact of collective memory but a glimpse into an individualised conflict between competing cultural narratives. Ossian, the bard, struggles with the genealogy of his past even as he recognises the futility of his song. *The Poems of Ossian* transport that conflict into eighteenth-century Scotland by repackaging it within a fully-annotated literary form.

It is often quoted from the Highland Society of London's report that Macpherson had been in the habit of 'fill[ing] up the chasms' of Gaelic oral tradition. [11] It is these filled chasms, however, which allow *The Poems of Ossian* to be read as a modern text. This chapter, while interested in the concept of authenticity, seeks to examine the text as a modern production because, translation or not, it arrived at a crucial junction in the history of Scotland, just after the last Jacobite Rebellion and before the Highland Clearances. During this time, the status of the Highlands was mired in doubt, and the institutions of the Lowlands were wrestling the place of Scotland within the Union. Ian Haywood indicates that the historicist elements of *The Poems of Ossian* were used to negotiate ancient literature as a form of social history.[12] Following this line, it can be argued that Macpherson was using the ancient to re-evaluate contemporary events, using a form of historical cohesion often employed in nationalist narratives.[13] By invoking a common ancient origin, he can establish a modern justification for the preservation of these practices. This is what Bakhtin would call 'historical inversion': the idea that future events can be represented through an imagined past.[14] In this case, that future is one of cultural

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[8] McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility,* p. 34.
[9] Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance*, p. 141; Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism,* p. 56.
[10] Colin Kidd, 'Gaelic Antiquity and National Identity in Enlightenment Ireland and Scotland', *The English Historical Review,* 109.434 (1994), p. 1214.
[11] Sinclair, *The Poems of Ossian in the Original Gaelic,* p. v.
[12] Ian Haywood, *The Making of History,* p. 74.
[13] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 4.
[14] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 147.

termination, relevant to the Gaelic world from which *The Poems of Ossian* emerged. That termination, however, is situated within a framework of ancient Scotland, wherein Ossian contains the last memories of his race.

The Poems of Ossian are inundated with unmitigated tensions which speak to this historical inversion. Moore states this point most clearly when he noted the poems exist not as a solution of cultural tensions but rather a testimony of them. He introduced, in relation to the poems, Northrop Frye's concept of sparagmos—'the sense that heroism and effective action are absent, disorganised, or foredoomed to defeat, and that confusion and Anarchy reign over the world.'[15] Herein most of the problems involving Ossianic scholarship derive— not from any questions of authenticity but from the inherent conflicts found within the text's burdensome prose, heavy-handed annotations, and convoluted narrative structure. Stafford and Gaskill have even characterised the reading of *The Poems of Ossian* as 'notoriously unstraightforward'.[16] Of course, that opaque quality of the text, defined by verbose and bombastic portrayals of violent imagery and pathetic nostalgia, can say as much about *The Poems of Ossian* as the narrative itself.

Translating Style and Form in *The Poems of Ossian*

Regardless of any authenticity question, Macpherson himself is present within the poems. As with any translation, there are differences from the original, and the poems are highly stylised from the known original sources. As this dissertation seeks to examine *The Poems of Ossian* as a modern text, it can be useful to understand where these divergences occur so that Macpherson's voice can be teased out from the ancient overtures. As noted in the Introduction, Thomson has identified several sources where Macpherson followed the Gaelic source closely in translation, yet there are many other divergences that are extremely distant from Ossianic tradition. For example, not only does Macpherson merge the Cù Chullain cycle with the Fenian cycle but within *Fingal*, he combines the ballads of 'Garbh Mac Stairn' and 'Manus/Magnus'.[17] Donald Meek has indicated that while prose works did appear in the twelfth-century Irish collection *Acallam na Seanórach,* bardic

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[15] Dafydd Moore, 'Heroic Incoherence in James Macpherson's "The Poems of Ossian"', *Eighteenth-Century Studies,* 34.1 (2000), pp. 44-45.
[16] Stafford and Gaskill, 'Introduction' in *From Gaelic to Romantic*, p. xii.
[17] Thomson, *The Gaelic Sources of Macpherson*, p. 11-17.

verse was typically a highly formal metrical school, with amateur balladry adhering to looser, but still metrical, structures.[18]

Macpherson, however, dispensed with traditional poetical form almost completely. His unmeasured prose and verbose paragraphs stand in contrast to the short lines and stanzas found in the 'Specimen of the Original of Temora, Book Seventh' he included in *Temora*. Although Macpherson provided the 'Specimen of the Original' in order to verify the Gaelic origins of *The Poems of Ossian,* he does not strictly abide by the Gaelic sample. A comparison of the English and the Gaelic texts reveal a discrepancy in language and style. He traded 's mi m' aonar an àm na h'oicha' ('I am lonely in the night time') for 'lonely in the season of dreams'; and 'Ghluais an ri, le sleagh, gu grad' ('The king moved/struck, with a spear, suddenly') for 'The king took his deathful spear'.[19] Macpherson's language becomes more abstract in English than in Gaelic. He took relatively simple, measured language in the Gaelic and altered it to fit within the highly decorated style of the English, which he referred to as 'animated' diction.[20] The stylised language adds significant drama and action to the narrative.

Whether *The Poems of Ossian* are taken as a translation or an original construction (or both), its style deviated from not just Gaelic balladry but from neoclassical poetry as well.[21] The neoclassical or 'Augustan' style had been in fashion during the earlier half of the eighteenth century. The regulated austerity of Classical art, both in its physical and literary forms, attracted those who rejected the excess of Baroque motifs, and the neoclassical form sought to emulate this effect through strict meter and persistent rhyme.[22] Stafford has suggested that Macpherson's free form represented both the 'irregularity' of primitive poetry and the collapse of Augustan literary rules.[23] While Macpherson chased comparisons between the bardic figures of Homer and Ossian, he abandoned the austere imitations of Classical form.[24] Under the guise of a translation, his prose-poem form anticipated the emerging novel genre more than it embraced contemporary guidelines for

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[18] Donald E. Meek, 'The Gaelic Ballads of Scotland: Creativity and Adaptation', in *Ossian Revisited,* pp. 19-48 (p. 22).

[19] These lines translated by the author in comparison from the English in 'Temora: Book Seventh', in *The Poems of Ossian*, p. 279 and the Gaelic 'A Specimen of the Original of Temora, Book Seventh', pp. 330-1.

[20] 'Temora Book I', FN 2, p. 479.

[21] Trevor-Roper, *The Invention of Scotland*, p. 75.

[22] Damien Valdez, *German Philhellenism: The Pathos of the Historical Imagination from Winckelmann to Goethe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), p. 5.

[23] Stafford, *The Sublime Savage*, pp. 89-102.

[24] 'I shall, however, observe, that all the precepts, which Aristotle drew from Homer, ought not to be applied to the composition of a Celtic bard; nor ought the title of the latter to the epopaea to be disputed, even if he should differ in some circumstances, from a Greek poet.' Macpherson, 'Temora, Book VIII,' FN 1, *The Poems of Ossian*, p.522.

verse. Macpherson inhabits the text through this liberated poetic delivery, wherein his poetry loses its original constrictions of form and moves uninhibited by original considerations of genre.

A good comparison to *The Poems of Ossian* is Jerome Stone's translation of 'Albin and the Daughter of Mey' (1756), which provides an example of what a more conventional translation of Gaelic poetry from this period might look like:

> Whence come these dismal sounds that fill our ears
>   Why do the groves such lamentations send!
> Why sit the virgins on the hill of tears,
>   While heavy sighs their tender bosoms rend!
> They weep for Albin of the flowing hair,
>   Who perish'd by the cruelty of Mey;
> A blameless hero, blooming, young, and fair;
>   Because he scorn'd her passions to obey.
> See on yon western hill the heap of stones,
> Which mourning friends have raised over his bones![25]

This form, just one quatrain short of a proper Shakespearean sonnet, adheres to a basic rhyming structure in iambic pentameter. *The Poems of Ossian* abandon the idea of versification altogether. For example, Fragment VII opens:

> Why openest those afresh the spring of my grief, O son of Alpin, inquiring how Oscur fell? My eyes are blind with tears, but memory beams on my heart. How can I relate the mournful death of the head of the people! Prince of the warriors, Oscur, my son, shall I see thee no more![26]

A visual comparison of the two translations shows the difference in form between the almost-sonnet of Stone and the prose of Macpherson. While both invoke elegiac imagery, Stone's narration stands at a distance from the events, one which looks 'on yon western hill', while Macpherson's is intensely personal, expressing Ossian's intimate grief. Herein, *The Poems of Ossian* shift from the exacting order of regulated verse towards a more modern form, characterised by sentimental overtones and eloquent diction.[27]

Ossian is typically cast against a volatile and, at times, hostile physical landscape, which is most often described in terms of its grandeur and power. This world is one in which 'the torrent shrieks down the rock'[28] and youth is a 'sunbeam' slowly decayed by

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[25] Stone, 'Albin and the Daughter of Mey', in *Report of the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland,* p. 105, originally published in Scots Magazine (1776).
[26] Macpherson, 'Fragment VII', *The Poems of Ossian*, p. 16.
[27] Porter, 'Bring me the Head of Macpherson', p. 400.
[28] Macpherson, 'Songs of Selma', *The Poems of Ossian,* p. 167.

the shadow of age.[29] 'Heaven burns with all its stars', and 'gales shake their rustling wings.'[30] Nature, ignorant of humanity yet reflective of human actions, stands as the liminal gatekeeper between epochs and worlds. It not only evokes a sublime sensation of natural power but stands as the junction at which the past and future intersect with the present and where the mortal can commune with the immortal.

Time and the Ghosts of Memory

In *The Poems of Ossian*, bardic memory, which contains the knowledge of the bard's mythic predecessors, is infused with supernatural power. Such power arises through generational oral transmission, and although this transmission is destined to fail, the doomed hero, still ensnared within the chaos of the natural world, reflects with nostalgia towards the lost. Here, the aged bard does not aspire for a solution but wallows in the desperate condition of his pedigree, resurrecting the dead with his song yet knowing that when he dies, none will remain to sing his own song. This collective remembrance manifests within the songs of the bards and resurrects the dead into literal, but intangible, ghosts. Within the narrative, time allows ghosts to move between past, present, and future. Thus, they can easily bring back a futuristic modern sentimentality into Ossian's hunting present while simultaneously standing as representations of the epic past.

The ghosts themselves return most often in time of battle or mourning; the past, then, serves not just to memorialise but to cope with present turmoil. Ghosts are also instilled with virtues of foresight; they serve not just to remind heroes but to warn them. These spectres survive through the songs of the bards, accompanied by mists or storms. Macpherson explains this concept in a series of footnotes between Books I and III of *Fingal*. Ghosts appeared to living souls before 'great undertakings'.[31] The ghosts of warriors in particular 'were supposed in those times to rule the storms and to transport themselves in a gust of wind from one country to another.'[32] Before a death would occur, a ghost would 'come mounted on a meteor and surround twice or thrice the place destined for the person to die; and then goes along the road through which the funeral is to pass, shrieking at intervals; at last, the meteor and ghost disappear above the burial place.'[33] In this way, the ghosts of the past warn of future deaths through the phenomena, which they

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[29] A typical example of this frequent metaphor appears as the 'Sunbeam of youth' in 'Fingal Book II', *The Poems of Ossian,* p. 69
[30] Macpherson, 'Temora, Book Seventh,' pp. 279; 'Carric-Thura', p. 163.
[31] Macpherson, 'Fingal Book I', FN 62, *The Poems of Ossian,* p. 422.
[32] Macpherson, 'Fingal Book III', FN 25, *The Poems of Ossian* p. 428.
[33] Macpherson, 'Fingal Book I', FN 108, *The Poems of Ossian* pp. 424-5.

themselves provoke. The bards act as mediums for the spectres, and as such, their role as transmitters of the past are sealed.

Standard romantic explanations exist for Macpherson's use of the supernatural. Trumpener has identified these motifs as a prototype of later romantic and gothic conventions, wherein the vigour of nature and its association with the supernatural 'reanimate' what is dead and gone.[34] Potkay offers a colder, more intellectualised option: the dead are resurrected, not literally on the stormy landscape, but within the imaginations of the speakers, who actively remember and converse with the ghosts in a heightened (yet self-aware) prosopopoeia.[35] Yet these explanations gloss over another essential aspect: that of poetical historicism. Reanimation and prosopopoeia may contribute to this poiesis within the text but they do not fully explain the concept of historical transmission as represented through the supernatural abilities of song. Peter Womack broaches this topic by associating Ossian's blindness with the classical visionary poetics of Homer; according to Womack, where Homer's supernatural beings are diachronic, Ossian's ghosts exist only in the past.[36] In a way, this is true, as ghosts appear not to Ossian in his present condition but in his stories of the past, although Womack would argue that 'all the characters are ghosts'.[37] One must be careful with this reading, however, because of the Ossianic connections between ghosts and prophecy. While Ossian's stories of ghosts take place in the past, the ghosts themselves are outside of time, representing the communion between past, present, and future.

Within Ossian's poetical historicism, bardic transmission is particularly important. Ossian, as both narrator and bard, serves as our most important evidence of this, but he is not the sole example. Cuchullin also admits the pleasure of hearing old stories from a bard, after hearing the story of Connal, and Lamderg is heard humming during battle. As Carril sings in 'Fingal Book VI', 'Cromla, with its cloudy steeps, answered to his voice. The ghosts of those the sung came in with their rustling blasts. They were seen to bend with joy towards the sounds of their praise.'[38] When the bard sings in battle to summon the strength of his ancestors, he utilises the supernatural power of the historical to inform him in the present. Yet, as a written text, *The Poems of Ossian* has an additional layer to it. Readers, aware but outside of Ossian's present, absorb the transmission of the ancient bard and his

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[34] Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism,* p. 75.
[35] Potkay, *Eloquence in the Age of Hume*, p. 206.
[36] Womack, *Improvement and Romance*, p. 101.
[37] Ibid, p. 100.
[38] 'Fingal Book VI', *The Poems of Ossian* ,p. 99

more ancient ancestors. In a way, readers exist in Ossian's future and participate in the historicisation of Scotland.

Readers are acutely aware—as Ossian is—that the vitality of the transmission is fading. Within Fingal and Ossian's world, transmission is generational. The foil of past Fingal and future Oscar appears early in Book III of *Fingal*:

> Fingal himself was next to the foe; and listened to the tales of bards. His godlike race were in the song, the chiefs of other times. Attentive, leaning on his shield, the king of Morven sat. The wind whistled through his aged locks, and his thoughts are of the days of other years. Near him on his bending spear, my young, my lovely Oscar stood. He admired the king of Morven: and his actions were swelling in his soul.[39]

Oscar inherits heroic inspiration from his grandfather, who himself now dwells in his own past glory. The implication is that these nostalgic heritages will survive through Oscar, who will then pass it on to his offspring. When Oscar dies, the lineage dies with him, and the past, which lived in him, dies as well. Without Oscar to carry on his legacy, Ossian's belief is that he and his ancestors will end at his line. Hence the stress on Ossian's place as 'last of his race'. If the song can no longer be sung, ghosts can no longer be summoned, and the fluidity of time is lost. Oscar's death signifies the death of Ossian's future, and as Fingal grows older and nears his own death, a strong fear of obsolescence dominates Ossian's grief. He is unable to use his music as a way to predict the future or summon the past.

This suspends Ossian in limbo. The power of the oral song manifests through generational transmission, and without that transmission, Ossian recognises that the memories of his ancestors will die with him. So it is not only the death of his son or his own impending demise that gives him such grief; he understands that the death of his memory is the annihilation of his history. The power of orality was in danger, and only through a literary medium could it be revived.

Historicity and Literacy

The Poem of Ossian's mutable time distorts efforts to categorise and rationalise historical events. As a poem purporting to be historical, this convoluted temporal system complicated its reception in eighteenth-century Scotland. The bard subverted systems of dating by

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[39]Macpherson, 'Fingal Book III', *The Poems of Ossian*, p. 77

infusing his primitive environment with modern manners. [40] The uncertain position of Ossian in this context means that he is unsettled within the contemporary guidelines. While it was easy enough to call him a third-century bard, there was no sense of where his 'third-century' belonged or how such modern sensibilities could manifest in his primitive, sublime landscape. Katie Trumpener has explained that this chronological framework 'creates a complex temporality of bardic repertoire that both constitutes history and stands outside historical time.'[41]

The bardic method of history derives not from textual authority of manuscripts preserved through the ages but from oral tradition. Specifically, there are two types of historical authority in *The Poems of Ossian*, which overlap: bardic authority and ancestral authority. Ancestral authority appears through the phenomena of ghosts, who also serve as soothsayers of the future, whereas bards transmit the histories of the ancestors through song, which are encoded in the poems as being a prime source of inspiration to warriors. There is no real death so long as the bards continue to sing their songs; this is what Ossian tells Malvina after the death of Oscar.[42] In fact, the only time Ossian is incapable of singing is at his son's death.

Beyond the history of the epic past, which, as established earlier, occurs within an uncertain and non-linear temporality, *The Poems of Ossian* contain strong notes on the reality of Macpherson's past and present. As stated in the introduction, many have been tempted to ascribe Jacobite interpretations to Macpherson's work. That idea, however, is disputed, and it ignores the wider context of Highland history during that period. More illuminating than the defeat at Culloden are the Acts of Proscription levelled against Highlanders in 1746. Like the Ossianic bard, the Highlands were under threat of cultural extinction. The symbols of the clans, including tartan, were outlawed for a period of time, and Highlanders were disarmed to prevent insurgency.[43] Gaelic in particular was under siege as the 'rude speech of a barbarous people.'[44] It can be useful to see *The Poems of Ossian* not as a Jacobite text but as a post-Jacobite text, one which may not espouse

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[40] See Maureen N. McLane, 'The Figure Minstrelsy Makes: Poetry and Historicity', *Critical Inquiry*, 29.3 (2003), pp. 429-52 (p. 434).
[41] Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, p. 76.
[42] 'Be thou near, to learn the song; and future times shall hear of Ossian.' Macpherson, 'The War of Caros', *The Poems of Ossian,* p. 114.
[43] Harvey Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1993), p. 530.
[44] Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland and The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides,* ed. by peter Levi (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 116.

Jacobite virtues but which clearly explores issues of cultural extinction in the wake of Culloden.

This reading is pertinent for Ossian, the last custodian of his dying race. Ossian struggles, as he grants that only oral tradition can transmit and resurrect the past while knowing the limitations of this orality lies in the mortality of his lineage. Moore suggests that, when coupled with Macpherson's personal beliefs regarding the limitations of oral culture, *The Poems of Ossian*'s construction indicates a self-awareness on behalf of Ossian with 'a scepticism about non-literate mechanisms of cultural transmission'.[45] That is to say, Ossian's mournful nostalgia about the past is heightened by a dismal sense of the failure of oral tradition. The textuality of *The Poems of Ossian*–as an eighteenth-century publication—grants credence to this concept, but one must remember that within the text, orality is granted that ultimate power by Ossian and his cohort. A conflict arises from the glorification of bards and the physical evidence that *The Poems of Ossian*, as a book, represents in the power of transmission.

Indeed, the very form of a book allows Macpherson to indulge in certain paratextual practices that Ossian, as a bard, cannot. The performance of the text mutates. The oral piece, which interacts and improvises with its audience, becomes fixed and staid on the page, where remains unchanged and untouched by audience reception.[46] Macpherson interchanges elements of both literary and oral tradition. His translation is not just then a translation of language but a translation of medium and of form. Anja Gunderloch suggests that Macpherson 'used a conceptually oral approach using means and techniques that were medially literary.'[47] Macpherson's mediation to both oral and literary performance causes the translation to contradict itself. If only the songs of the bards can revive the guidance of the past, what is the utility of the publication of *The Poems of Ossian*? If the textual printing of the poems allows the traditions to survive, does that mean Ossian is ultimately wrong and should readers distrust him as a narrative or historical authority? It is little wonder that Moore thinks that Macpherson has rejected oral tradition with *The Poems of Ossian*. While it is debatable about whether or not Macpherson's later historical writings dismiss oral tradition, he failed within *The Poems of Ossian* to

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[45] Dafydd Moore, '"As Flies the Unconstant Sun": Tradition, Memory and Cultural Transmission', *Eighteenth Century Ireland,* 23 (2008), p. 89.
[46] Rosalind Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 33.
[47] Anja Gunderloch, 'The Real Ossian', in *Orality, Literacy, and Modern Media*, ed.by Dietrich Scheunemann, (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996), p. 45.

decisively support literariness versus orality. Indeed, if anything, *The Poems of Ossian* celebrates orality, despite the awareness of its deficiencies.

Although cognisant to the deficits of oral history, Macpherson understands the limitations of literary practice as well. An oral tradition requires cultural context, and it is rare that a listener would not belong to the same or similar collective cultural consciousness as the bard. The bard can adapt to the listener's gaps of knowledge, by freely providing and adjusting his tales to the listener.[48] A writer cannot adjust. A writer writes for an entire audience, regardless of the audience's disparate cultural practices or their variegated educations, and a writer cannot respond to each reader individually.[49] Hence his need to annotate the minute details of *The Poems of Ossian*. Macpherson, in a need to provide that flexible sequence of information, relies on marginalia. He anticipates problems and questions within the text while supplementing the story with additional information. In this way, he practices a kind of bardic authority through the literary medium.

This kind of narrative authority was as important to eighteenth-century fiction as much as it was to non-fictions. Literary productions frequently constructed their texts as 'letters' or 'memoirs' to grant them a façade of authenticity.[50] Horace Walpole introduced the *Castle of Otranto* as a manuscript 'found in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of England.'[51] Initial copies of *Robinson Crusoe* boasted that the book was written by the eponymous (and fictional) hero himself.[52] The amorphous state of literature in the era borrowed so heavily from the concept of authority and retrieval that many writers depended on a fictionalised textual source for their mythical authority. Macpherson diverged from this pattern. He presented an oral tradition through a literary medium, where the narrator was glorified but distrusted, and his society canonised as much as it was scrutinised. Macpherson does not castigate orality nor does he boast the superiority of literary texts, but he does grapple with the question of authority, uncertain of how to proceed. In a way, he acknowledges the merit of both authoritative modes, relying on

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[48] Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece,* pp. 30-34.
[49] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 77-78.
[50] Russett, *Fictions and Fakes,* p. 14.
[51] Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto,* ed. E. J. Clery, (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2008), p. 5.
[52] This authenticating device was inserted into the title of the book itself, as can be seen in Daniel Defoe, *The life, and strange surprizing adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, mariner…Written by himself,* (London: W. Taylor, 1719).

Ossian's oral authority to bolster his own textual authority, even as that text proves the fragility of the oral culture.

Macpherson's personal authority becomes more and more prominent in the text as time passes. This development occurs in the progression of the three books over time. The original *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* lacked the extensive notes that would characterise *Fingal* and *Temora*. Huge gaps existed between the poems, and there was no indication internally or externally about their relation to one another. Where *Fragments* lacked cohesive structure, *Fingal* provided, not just an interconnected storyline but extensive notes on the text itself. These extra-textual notes appeared in the form of arguments before each book and detailed annotations. These annotations are as interesting as the poems themselves because they create a fissure between the poetry and history of *The Poems of Ossian*. Contained within the annotations are glossaries of both Celtic and Scandinavian lore, parallels to Greek and Roman figures, and quotations from Milton and Pope. It is as though Macpherson was consciously crafting *The Poems of Ossian* to coalesce with a variety of traditions and to fit within every conceivable canon.

Through this framework, the text moulds the readers' interpretation of the poems towards a Classical understanding of Celtic literature. The primary purpose of footnotes was to provide elucidation on aspects of the text without intruding on the author's voice. (John Toland, when annotating Martin Martin's *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* in 1720, defended his additions as 'competent information.'[53]) Yet footnotes ultimately serve as an aspect of textual authority within the poems, and while it is easy to pigeon-hole annotations as a critical, and not literary, device, it is not unheard of for literature to use footnotes to establish narrative authority. Shari Benstock has reflected on this device, establishing the difference between a footnote in a critical work and a literary one: the critical footnote reflects back on the text itself while the literary footnote addresses and engages the reader.[54] Macpherson does both. His footnotes are part of a dialogic process in which he consciously invents a place for *The Poems of Ossian* within the European literary canon. He does this by contextualising the practices of the 'alien' and 'savage' Highlands as part of a Classical Gaelic Culture. Footnotes provided what Haywood defines as 'a mechanical and simple way of building an authenticating

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[53] J. A. I. Champion, 'Enlightened Erudition and the Politics of Reading in John Toland's Circle' *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Mar., 2006), pp.111-41 (p. 116).
[54] Shari Benstock, 'At the Margin of Discourse: Footnotes in the Fictional Text', *PMLA*, 98.2 (1983), pp. 204-25 (p. 206).

apparatus.'[55] Haywood traces the utility of the footnote as a way to improve the readability of a text and maintain the authority of its information without the infringement of burdensome academic jargon. Macpherson's footnotes range from the explanatory ('Ryno is often mentioned in the ancient poetry—He seems to have been a bard, of the first rank, in the days of Fingal')[56] and linguistic notes ('Neart-mor, great strength. Lora, noisy')[57], to quotations from canonical writers (including Dryden, Pope's *Iliad*, and Milton) and supplementary folklore. He also occasionally alludes to Biblical verses.[58] These notes were meant to bolster the reader's comprehension as much as they were to engross the reader in the cultural flavour of the highlands.

What the footnotes themselves say are as important to *The Poems of Ossian* as the narrative itself. The glosses on Celtic and Scandinavian antiquity create a sense of narrative that expands beyond the text itself. The annotations provide connections, familial relations, and histories of each character that are not included in the individual stories. These notes are frequently self-referential, coaxing readers into referring to previous books or volumes of *The Poems of Ossian* as evidence of the cultural or historical practice taking place. They also help clarify which parts of the story intertwine, exhibiting the complexity of the narrative within the book itself. By this, the annotations assert consistency of practice. They also induce the sense that *The Poems of Ossian* do not stand as an isolated narrative but rather join a dynamic canon wherein Ossianic tradition informs and is informed by its historical and geographic neighbours.

Furthermore, where Macpherson references northern European traditions, he also compares these traditions to Classical texts. Here, Macpherson deliberately equivocates Ossian and the Celtic tradition with Homer and the wider Greco-Roman tradition. Occasionally, he will even defend any digressions from Homeric tradition, such as in the opening footnote to *Temora*:

> Tho' this poem of Ossian has not perhaps all the minutiae, which Aristotle, from Homer, lays down as necessary to the conduct of an epic poem, yet, it is presumed, it has all the grand essentials of the epopoea. United of time, place, and action is preserved throughout. The poem opens in midst of things […] The circumstances are grand, and the diction animated; neither descending into a cold meanness, nor swelling into ridiculous bombast.[59]

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[55] Haywood, *The Making of History,* p. 24.
[56] Macpherson, 'The War of Caros', FN 4, *The Poems of Ossian,* p. 438.
[57] Macpherson, 'The Battle of Lora', FN 14, *The Poems of Ossian*, p. 441.
[58] Macpherson, 'The Battle of Lora', FN 6, *The Poems of Ossian*, p. 441.
[59] Macpherson, 'Temora Book I', *The Poems of Ossian*, FN 2, p. 479.

Thus Macpherson situates his poem within Homeric rubrics and acknowledges Homer as the ultimate poetic authority. The use of such authority sealed Macpherson's popularity with antiquarians and bolstered Ossian's reputation as the 'Scottish Homer'.[60]

These connections between Homer and Ossian were frequently expounded upon by the literati and other readers.[61] What has attracted less attention is Macpherson's own association with Alexander Pope. Pope's translation of the *Iliad of Homer* was considered by Samuel Johnson to be 'the greatest work of the kind that has ever been produced.'[62] Pope's translation is notable for its strict iambic pentameter and consistent rhyming couplets, a style which contrasts sharply with Macpherson's prose-poetry. Yet Pope's translation of the *Iliad* proved to be an important asset to Macpherson in his canon-building. The annotations are rife with direct quotations from Pope's text. In this way, Macpherson consciously associates Ossian with Homer but also himself with Pope, despite their stylistic differences. 'Book IV' of *Fingal* states: 'I hummed, as I was wont in danger, the songs of heroes of old. Like distant thunder, Lochlin heard; they fled; my son pursued.'[63] The endnote to this line states:

> Ossian gives the reader a high idea of himself. His very song frightens the enemy. This passage resembles on in the eighteenth *Iliad*, where the voice of Achilles frightens the Trojans from the body of Patroclus.—Forth march'd the chief, and distant from the crowd/High on the rampart rais'd his voice aloud. So high his brazen voice the hero rear'd, /Hosts drop their arms and trembled as they fear'd.[64]

Here, Macpherson interprets the text before comparing it to a similar instance in the *Iliad*, which specifically references Pope's *Iliad*. The frequent acknowledgement of this text indicates that Macpherson may have used Pope's poetical translation as a model for his own translation. At the very least, it demonstrates a conscious effort to place the *Poems of Ossian* on the same elevated stage of literary eminence as the *Iliad of Homer*.

Relying on the concept of annotations as clarifying evidence only sows further discord within *The Poems of Ossian* as Macpherson weaves more narratives into the work. The voices that emerge, then, is not just that of the aged bard Ossian or of the guiding pen of Macpherson but a multitude of characters from various traditions, sources, and time periods. The soldiers of ancient Greece appear alongside early modern thinkers, who are

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[60] Blair, *Critical Dissertation*, p. 357.
[61] Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue*, p. 537.
[62] James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Angus Calder (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1999), p. 649.
[63] Macpherson, 'Fingal Book IV,' *The Poems of Ossian*, p. 84
[64] Macpherson, 'Fingal Book IV', FN 9, *The Poems of Ossian*, p. 430

sequestered into contemporary concepts of authority and manners. Meanwhile, Scandinavian, Irish, and Aramaic presences lurk in the foreground, reminding the reader of the wider global context of the poems. The presence and extreme detail of the annotations exist, not as a supplementary text but as a complementary one. Without them, the poems are nearly incomprehensible, and with them, *The Poems of Ossian*, as a text, is rendered more convoluted.

It creates the possibility for a wide range of readings, from the Classical to the Celtic to the modern. To its eighteenth-century audience, a struggle emerged. What began as enthusiastic support for its Celtic elements ceded to general confusion as various readings battled for dominance in the public sphere. That public debate, controlled largely by intellectuals, antiquarians, and moderate Whigs, eventually lost itself to the larger contest of nationalism and authenticity. But for many within academia, *The Poems of Ossian* remained the preeminent source of Celtic antiquarianism, a clear representation of a pre-commercial Scotland. Poetical authority, and its cousins of eloquence, Gothicism, and orality, joined progressive representations of history. They did not solve the tensions between these seemingly discordant ideologies. If anything, they upset them.

Chapter Two: History and the Scottish Enlightenment

Few historians today would accept the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* as an exact transcript of Greek wars. Yet today there is an acknowledged value in these constructed histories.[1] Almost every recorded culture mythologises their peoples' origins, and packaged within these oral histories are a specific 'social product' transmitted from generation to generation.[2] Maurice Halbwachs defined these elements as collective memory, which arise through the shared experiences of people moving within the same spaces. Although their interactions with the spaces may be individualised, a hive-minded reaction occurs if the space is disturbed. These spatial memories are derived from the images and communal interactions dispersed within the familiar realm.[3]

To some degree, historical texts, as literary artefacts, also contribute to collective memory, insomuch as they package and disseminate that collective history into stream-lined text for consumption by the very public that participates in the memory. The author's rendering of history may be an isolated interpretation, but if read by an audience of people, it seeps into the public narrative, and, if accepted by the public, it can contribute to the new history. Gordon S. Shrimpton defines this fragile line between memory and history as thus: 'In most cases, memory simply decays, but history can renew itself by returning to the evidence.'[4] Hence the historian's dependency on primary sources—the product of original memory—as opposed to the revisionist dangers of secondary sources.

In order to fully appreciate the ways that *The Poems of Ossian* seeped into the general public narrative of Highlandism and Scottish history, it is essential to understand the intellectual context in which it emerged. Rather than agree on particular historical elements, writers tended towards certain methods of historiography, which were often characterised by their particular academic stance. Rather than focus on history as a discrete and concrete discipline, many writers incorporated history as both a matter of public interest and a subject of popular entertainment. History, in this period, comprises not just written monographs but lectures, studies of the 'origins' of society, travelogues, and improvement tracts. What these diverse sources reveal is not just how the intellectuals

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[1] See Adam Nicolson, *The Mighty Dead: Why Homer Matters* (London: Williams and Collins, 2014).
[2] J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 94.
[3] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* p. 52-3.
[4] Gordon S. Shrimpton, *History and Memory in Ancient Greece,* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), p. 15.

processed history but how historical elements were received and interpreted within the other classes of society.

This chapter will explore some of the historiographical trends of eighteenth-century Scotland by looking at the role of history within both historical and non-historical writings. By doing so, it will examine the literati's interpretation of authentic history and explore the historiographical approach of the era as one directed towards the legitimatisation of social improvement, the justification of law, and the instruction of moral philosophy. In particular, it will focus on the reconstructions of ancient and early-medieval Scotland and the impediments that arose from limited historical documentation, forcing writers to rely on problematic sources to address large gaps in Scottish history. By doing so, it will construct an impression of the academic debates into which the Ossianic poems emerged.

Trends, Themes, and Motives in the Writing of History

If written histories are treated as artefacts in their own right, — that is to say, if they are taken as primary sources of the epistemological debates within their own time periods—interesting questions emerge. During the long eighteenth century, many histories reinforced contemporary social progress through a structured manipulation of historical events. History was considered a cultural artefact, but an underlying desire to understand the machinations of history in scientific terms combined with the obscurity of that history influenced trends in historical writing, as will be seen in the writing of David Hume, Adam Smith, John Millar, Hugh Blair, and others.[5]

In this chapter, the term 'history' will be defined as the study of past sequential causality that was utilised for two purposes: one, to explain and justify contemporary social systems and two, to postulate theoretical innovations to these systems. It may seem as though history is too vague a term to have any real significance in the broader study of intellectual culture, but a careful examination of eighteenth-century sources reveal that although a professional historical discipline was in its infancy, history in this period had a particular function in the teaching and conceptualisation of legal, moral, and social theory.[6] History, when taken as a monolithic term, represented the authority of the collectively-remembered but unexperienced past. Many writers of history would not have classified themselves as historians, due to their primary interest in law and philosophy, but their

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[5] Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, p.67.
[6] Allan, *Virtue, Learning, and the Scottish Enlightenment,* pp. 55-66.

methodology included the investigation of surviving documents to trace the causes of both great and terrible events.[7] As John Millar opens to the *Origin of Distinction of Ranks:*

> By observing the systems of law established in different parts of the world, and by remarking on the consequences with which they are attended, men have endeavoured to reap advantage from the experience of others, and to make a selection of such institutions and modes of government as appear most worthy of being adopted.[8]

A prominent aspect of both Calvinist and Humanist scholarship, history, when reduced to a chain of causal events, may suggest that apparent causes have apparent consequences, and from this, an empirical formula for present society and future improvement can be deduced.*[9]*

The obscurity of pre-medieval history combined with the growing ambition towards improvement influenced a wide range of historical writing. One lingering question was why certain cultures appeared to be at a more 'advanced' stage of both technology and civilisation than others, which appeared to be suspended in a 'barbarous' or 'rude' state.[10] Adam Smith tackled these ideas within what would become known as stadial history, wherein human society developed through four linear stages: hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and commerce.[11] His theory would influence constructions of history from nearly every other prominent member of the Scottish literati, with particular attention drawn from the moderate Whigs in Edinburgh: Hugh Blair would repeat it in his *Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian*; Ferguson would expand on the hunting stage throughout *A History of Civil Society;* John Millar asserted that there was 'a natural progress from ignorance to knowledge, and from rude to civilised manners, the several stages of which are usually accompanied with peculiar laws and customs.'[12]

The stadial system was not universally accepted. Dugald Stewart rejected the term rational or natural history for conjectural history, due to stadialism's theoretical basis.*[13]*

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[7] Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment,* p. 79.

[8] John Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks; or, An Inquiry into the Circumstances which give rise to Influence and Authority in the Different Members of Society,* ed. Aaron Garrett (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2006), p. 83.

[9] Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment,* pp. 61-65.

[10] Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment,* p. 84.

[11] Smith, 'Of Jurisprudence',' in *Lectures on Jurisprudence,* p. 14.

[12] Blair, *A Critical Dissertation*, in *The Poems of Ossian*, p. 353; Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society,* (London: T. Cadell, 1782), pp.160-230; Millar, *Origin on the Distinction of Ranks*, p. 85.

[13] Dugald Stewart, *Biographical Memoirs, of Adam Smith,* p. 49

Despite this criticism, Stewart provides the most coherent overview of the motives and questions driving this field of inquiry:

> Whence has arisen that systematical beauty which we admire in the structure of a cultivated language; that analogy which runs through the mixture of languages spoken by the most remote and unconnected nations; and those peculiarities by which they are all distinguished from each other? Whence the origin of the different sciences and of the different arts; and by what chain has the mind been led from their first rudiments to their last and most refined improvements? Whence the astonishing fabric of the political union; the fundamental principles which are common to all governments; and the different forms which civilised society has assumed in different ages of the world?[14]

More than mere curiosity instigated these questions. The literati used historical examples to elucidate on specific elements of human nature as universally progressing along a linear set of guidelines so they could understand how societies benefited and advanced from their actions. Millar expounds on this in *The Origin of Distinction of Ranks*:

> There is, however, in man a disposition and capacity for improving his condition, by the exertion of which, he is carried on from one degree of advancement to another; and the similarity of his wants, as well as of the faculties by which those wants are supplied, has everywhere produced a remarkable uniformity in the several steps of his progression.[15]

The prevalence of 'Origins' texts, like the *Origins of Distinction of Ranks*, demonstrate that the inauguration of human nature was intimately connected with the present. To understand the present machinations of society, a logical system could be deduced from the past sequences of history.[16]

There was an expectation of a historian that the written record would reflect a legitimate sequence of events that not only reflected the truth but conveyed a larger message. David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes, for example, characterised the historian as a truth-seeker 'whose principal endowments were a sagacious spirit of Criticism to distinguish Truth from Falsehood, and a freedom from prejudice to let the Truth be known.'[17] William Robertson stated that history 'which ought to record truth and to teach wisdom, often sets out with retailing fictions and absurdities.'[18] Because of this mythic basis, Robertson believed that 'the events which happened during infancy or youth, cannot

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[14] Ibid, p. 47.
[15] Millar, *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, p. 84
[16] Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment,* p. 67.
[17] David Dalrymple, *Annals of Scotland: from the Accession of Malcolm III in the Year MLVII to the Accession of the House of Stewart in the Year MCCCLXXI*, (Edinburgh: Balfour, 1776), p. iv.
[18] William Robertson, *The History of Scotland During the Reigns of of Queen Mary and King James VI*, Vol. 1 (London: G.R. Gleig, 1822 [1759]), p. 1.

be recollected, and deserve not to be remembered.'[19] His statement indicates doubt in the value of ancient history, as it cannot neither be completely accurate or fully known.

The tendency of ancient sources to construe events within mythical parameters increased the necessity of modern historical research. James Foulis of Colinton, a member of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, defended this idea in a lecture delivered to the society:

> By looking with a superstitious eye to historical tales, only venerable from antiquity, the ancient history has more the appearance of fable than truth; nay, in fact, it is so. Now it becomes time to emancipate ourselves from these trammels and with freedom and honest criticism, to select truth from falsehood, and no longer defend created history, but remain satisfied with the authentic though the imperfect portion that has escaped the history of time.*[20]*

This search for universal truth would become the heavy burden of each historian. By granting history this authority over human actions, 'history' itself becomes a conglomeration of human experiences boiled down to its barest elements.

Such an idealised portrayal of the discipline was tempered with scepticism towards a writers' motives. Many were acutely aware of how previous histories could be coloured by specific agendas or distorted by selective memory. Dalrymple castigated George Buchanan (1506-1582) for his 'wilful perversions of bigotry and party prejudice.'*[21]* Criticism was not limited to ancient chroniclers either. Malcolm Laing, in the 1805 edition of *The Poems of Ossian*, accused his recent forebears in Edinburgh, particularly Hugh Blair, of tampering with history by encouraging the 'spurious translations' of *The Poems of Ossian*.[22] Because of these misgivings, those interested in the 'origins' of humanity struggled with their primary sources, which more often than not, freely interwove myth with fact and credited divine agency to human actions.[23] Before, however, this problem can be understood, it should be elucidated why past events were used to empower future progress and how such an idea informed intellectual discourse in eighteenth-century Scotland.

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Foulis, "An Inquiry Into the Origin of the Name of the Scottish Nation, Presented to the Society of Antiquaries at Edinburgh, December 1770", in *Transactions of the Antiquaries of Scotland,* (Edinburgh: William and Alex Smellie, 1792), pp. 155-169, p. 169.

[21] Dalrymple, *Annals of Scotland*, pp. iii-iv.

[22] Laing, *The Poems of Ossian* p. xiv.

[23] Shrimpton, *History and Memory in Ancient Greece*, p. 37.

The public was developing a taste for history, and booksellers were eager to provide it.[24] As Edward Gibbon stated after the explosive popularity of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*: 'History is the most popular species of writing, since it can adapt itself to the highest or the lowest capacity.'[25] In other words, it can serve as a high academic pursuit as well satiate the public's interest in the 'curious spectacle' of past events. [26] Despite this, there are few pure academic histories and no professional historians during this time.[27] One factor in the dearth of historiographical study within this period comes from the perception that so little historiography exists. Rather, a number of writers from other disciplines embraced history as a method of exploring the foundations and ethics of civil institutions.[28] Historical writing existed largely in non-historical tracts, and it is in these tracts that the most influential historical theories of the day appeared. Adam Smith's Four Stages first surfaced in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, as it related to property rights.[29] David Hume quickly adopted this historical theory for use in 'Of Commerce'.[30] James Steuart boasted historical examples as proof of the need for self-sovereignty in *Political Economy*.[31] Their use of history appeals to a common heritage of their readers and to, some degree, a base of collective knowledge shared by the literate consumers of such works. Their historical examples are largely general; they refer to unspecified cultures which are meant to represent a general state of humanity. They are not meant to preach history so much as they are to use history as an agent to discuss politics, economics, or philosophy.

Moral philosophy, in particular, required an authoritative source as it attempted to deduce ethical strictures from the vigorous examination of humanity. It sought scientific procedures to find uniform patterns in human behaviour where standard experimental procedure would fail.[32] David Hume separated moral philosophy from natural in *Treatise of Human Nature*. Where Natural Philosophy yields consistent observations from standardised experiments, Moral Philosophy handles abstract and less tangible aspects of humanity that, if subject to the same method of experimentation as Natural Philosophy,

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[24] Haywood, *The Making of History*, p. 15.

[25] Edward Gibbon, *The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon*, ed. by John Murray (London: John Murray, 1897), p. 311.

[26] Blair, *Critical Dissertation*, p. 345.

[27] Haywood, *The Making of History*, p. 15.

[28] Meek, Raphael, and Stein, 'Introduction', in *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, p. 4.

[29] See Smith, 'Of Jurisprudence', *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, pp. 14-36

[30] 'Of Commerce', in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. by Eugene F. Miller, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), pp. 253-67.

[31] James Steuart, *An Inquiry Into the Principles of Political Economy*, (London: Millar and Cadell, 1767).

[32] Allan, *Virtue, Learning, and the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 174.

would yield inconsistent results limited by the observers' experience.[33] To mitigate this discrepancy, Hume advised, 'we must therefore glean up our experiments in this science from a cautious observation of human life, and take them as they appear in the common course of the world, by men's behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures.'[34] Hume sought to establish an academic standard based on these ideas, and other writers quickly followed. The idea that all of mankind followed particular patterns in behaviour, technology, and society is enforced by the concept that nature informed and framed humanity's development. Francis Hutcheson wrote:

> That this sense [of morality] is implanted by nature, is evident from this that in all ages and nations certain tempers and actions are universally approved and their contraries condemned, even by such as have in view no interest of their own.[35]

The concept of universal morality and a generic human nature inspired attempts to create a uniform system of ethics derived from the study of nature.

By identifying these universal patterns in human progression, writers could derive lessons for the contemporary nation. Such didactic use of historical narratives was meant to achieve moral ends through their dissemination.[36] If aware of the barbarism of the past, then the modern nation could free themselves from ideologies and manners that impeded their advancement.[37] While more general works like those produced by Millar and Smith could philosophise about history as a product of human nature, it was the historian's duty to take those patterns and apply them to a specific context. In a nation like Scotland, where Scottish manners and customs were considered inherently backwards or where poverty and isolation stunted the progress of northern communities, these lessons quickly morphed into the ideology of improvement.[38]

The improvement ideology is particularly pertinent to the Ossianic controversy because it informed the general perception of Gaelic society as a culture in need of civilising Anglo influence.[39] Richard Sher has suggested that improvement ideology was one of many reactions to the increased economic prosperity in Scotland after the union. Where some, such as Hume and Smith, sought to study the process of economic

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[33] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Nature of Reasoning into Moral Subjects,* (London: John Noon, 1739), pp. xviii-xix.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Francis Hutcheson, *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria with a Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy,* ed. by Luigi Turco (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007), pp. 17-18.
[36] Allan, *Virtue, Learning, and The Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 61.
[37] Richard A. Marsden, *Cosmo Innes and the Defence of Scotland's Past* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), p. 45.
[38] T. M. Devine, *Clearance and Improvement: Land, Power, and People in Scotland, 1700-1900* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2005), pp. 42-53.
[39] Malcolm Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture,* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 85.

development and others, namely the religious moderates in Edinburgh, sought to offset any negative impacts from the changing socio-economic sphere, improvement proponents believed in the deliberate and planned betterment of people and industry through the application of contemporary political, economic, and social theory.[40] Improvement required scrutiny of the processes behind ordinary situations so to correct inefficiencies, advance economic stature, and mitigate the vices of society.[41] Improvement existed in agriculture, manufacturing, education, and politics. These concepts of improvement were not new to the eighteenth century; they can arguably be traced back to Francis Bacon's reformist essays.[42] Others, such as David Allan, attribute it to early humanist writers like William Lithgow.[43] Regardless, by the eighteenth century, improvement had become a sustained goal for moral and academic endeavours.

Improvement is commonly argued as the dominating motive behind the Scottish enlightenment. Alexander Broadie describes this ideology as a 'guarded or qualified optimism'; while writers would theorise about methods of improvement, few actively sought application of their own ideas.[44] This inaction would become Dugald Stewart's primary criticism of his peers; to Stewart, the profusion of interest in the origins of nations failed to provide any utility towards the future improvement of society.[45] Nonetheless, 'improvement' as a precept does appear prevalent throughout intellectual institutions. The Edinburgh societies frequented by literati had strong overtones of improvement with many incorporating it into their very names. These included the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (established 1698), the Society of Improvers in the Knowledge of Agriculture (1723), the Edinburgh Select Society (1754), and its subsidiary Edinburgh Society for the Encouraging of Arts, Sciences, Manufactures, and Agriculture (1755). All of these were formed with the express purpose of reforming and supporting institutions around Scotland.*46*

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[40] Richard Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), p. 187.

[41] See *Improvement and Enlightenment : Proceedings of the Scottish Historical Studies Seminar University of Strathclyde 1987-1988* (Edinburgh: John MacDonald, 1989)

[42] See 'Of Innovations' in Francis Bacon, *Essays*, ed. Michael J. Hawkins (London: J. M. Dent, 1994), pp.

[43] Allan, *Virtue Learning, and the Scottish Enlightenment,* p. 57.

[44] Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 38.

[45] Dugald Stewart, *Biographical Memoirs, of Adam Smith, f William Robertson, D. D. and of Thomas Reid, D. D.: read before the Royal Society of Edinburgh,* (Edinburgh: G. Ramsay and Company, 1811), p. 124.

[46] These societies served a diverse range of social services. Society of Improvers in the Knowledge of Agriculture supported local farms and grain while discouraging members from buying foreign alcohol. Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge had formed to educate and encourage 'the reform of manners' in the Highlands. The Select Society of Edinburgh sought the improvement of agriculture,

The region most in need of improvement was the Highlands. The prevailing perception of the Highlands was one of barbarism, illiteracy, and crime, a stereotype unmitigated by the hostility of the terrain and what contemporary observers might call the 'unmeaning jargon' of the Gaelic language.[47] In his letters from the Highlands, Edmund Burt described the harrowing poverty that afflicted the northern regions of Scotland. He spoke of children without shoes or stockings; women carrying massive loads on their back; horses starved and abused until their tails fell off; and food so poor that people resorted to eating raw onions.[48] By the time Burt wrote his letters, these stereotypes of the Highlands were already institutionalised. Although more sympathetic to his native culture, Martin Martin mentions the need for improvement in the Hebrides in the preface to his 1695 *Description of the Western Islands of Scotland,* before many of the most prominent members of the Scottish Enlightenment were born.[49] Martin granted that although 'the inhabitants of these Islands do for the most part labour under the want of Knowledg [sic] of Letters, and other useful arts and sciences […] they seem to be better versed in the Book of Nature than many who have greater opportunities of improvement.'[50]

What Martin demonstrates with his use of the 'Book of Nature' is an early indication of Romantic auto-didactic culture, where ones' education can be equally informed by nature as it can by the university.[51] Hugh Blair would consider this to be an important catalyst for poetic genius, stating that 'amidst the rude scenes of nature, amidst rocks and torrents and whirlwinds and battles, dwells the sublime.'[52] This 'Book of Nature', however, was not universally considered a boon to Scottish society. The natural state of man was used as a descriptor of the origins of a pre-literate, pre-commercial society. Millar claimed that barbaric impulses occurred as the result of 'that instinct which nature has bestowed upon them'; civility required a restraint of such instinct and thus a

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mechanics, and literacy, which would be reflected in the name of its subsidiary. For a more thorough examination of these societies, see Davis D. McElroy, *Scotland's Age of Improvement: A Survey of Eighteenth Century Literary Clubs and Societies*, (Washington: Washington State University Press, 1969), pp. 7-10.

[47] For more on contemporary depictions of Highland topography, see Stafford, *The Sublime Savage* p. 9; 'unmeaning jargon' quoted from Alexander Campbell, *An Introduction to the History of Poetry in Scotland from the Beginning of the Thirteenth Century Down to the Present Time* (Edinburgh: Andrew Foulis), p. 26.

[48] *Burt's Letters from the North of Scotland,* Vol. 1. (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1754, reprint.. 1974), pp. 77-84, 95.

[49] Martin Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland, Circa 1695,* (London: A. Bell, 1695; reprint. 1703), p. xiii.

[50] Ibid, p. x.

[51] Valentina Bold, *James Hogg: A Bard of Nature's Making* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007).

[52] Blair, *Critical Dissertation,* p. 394.

departure from the natural state of man.[53] When it came to the Highlands, however, there was a general acceptance that the barbarism of its environment was an incubator of the barbarism of the man.[54] Burt blamed the environment and not the inherent nature of the Highlanders for their 'dirtiness and idleness.' He claimed that 'many of them, when they happened to be transplanted into a richer soil, grow as good servants as any whatever.'[55] So long that the Highlander struggled to satisfy his most basic needs, he or she could not progress to the higher stages of society. Considering how belligerent and poor the Highlands were perceived to be, it is not any wonder that some were anxious about the growing interest in Highland culture produced by *The Poems of Ossian*.

One anonymous book on *The History of the Feuds and Conflicts Among the Clans in the Northern Parts of Scotland and in the Western Isles* in 1780 declared that:

> Moreover all the islanders are of nature very suspicious, full of deceit and evil intention against their neighbours, by whatsoever way they may get them destroyed; sides this they are so cruel in taking revenge, that neither have they regard to person, time, age, or cause, as you may partly see in this particular.[56]

As will was discussed in the previous chapter, *The Poems of Ossian* promoted a very different composition of the Highlands, representing them as a civilisation capable of producing artistic genius. There is evidence that the characterisation of Highlanders as primitive was controversial, likely in the wake of *The Poems of Ossian*. Within *The History of the Feuds and Conflicts,* the printer appended a note to this statement disclaiming:

> We are no friend to such general reflections; they are, we think, too commonly dictated by prejudice of one kind or other; seldom founded on genuine knowledge, or proper information. Nothing but the fidelity we owe to the public, by which are bound to exhibit, from the press, The MS, exactly as we find it, could have induced us to print this reflection.[57]

To protect authorial integrity, the printer must allow those statements which seem controversial, yet the printer intrudes on the text to protect their own conception of the truth. Their duty to the integrity of their source material contrasts with their duty to what

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[53] Millar, *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, p. 102.
[54] Stafford, *The Sublime Savage* p. 9.
[55] 'Letter V', *Burt's Letters from the North of Scotland*, p. 94.

[56] *The History of the Feuds and Conflicts Among the Clans in the Northern Parts of Scotland and in the Western Isles; from the year M.XXXI. unto M.DC.XIX.* (Glasgow: J&J. Robertson, 1780), p. 31.
[57] 'Remark by the Printer', Ibid. p. 31.

they believe to be authentic history. It was a complicated issue that writers and publishers balanced when presenting 'authentic' accounts to educate and instruct their audience.

History could be entertaining as well; indeed, it was almost expected to entertain. But the primary function of the historian had little to do with his readers' tastes. Hume saw a schism in the telling of history, between the need to entertain for profit and the intellectual catalyst to progress.[58] Smith too believed that while history had the capacity to entertain, it was not its primary purpose:

> The design of historical writing is not merely to entertain; (this perhaps is the intention of an epic poem) besides that it has in view the instruction of the reader. It sets before us the more interesting and important events of human life, points out the causes by which these events were brought about and by this means points out to us what manner and method we may produce similar good effects and avoid similar bad ones.*[59]*

Broadie qualifies this as the difference between imagination and intellect, although contemporary writers had their own terms.[60] Pinkerton defined 'Genius' as a product of 'Erudition' and 'Learning', which require 'Letters'. Illiterate cultures, that is those without 'Letters', are incapable of 'Learning' and 'Erudition' and therefore cannot produce artistic 'Genius'.[61] Dalrymple maintained a similar perspective, marking difference between 'Fable' and 'History' ('History' here essentially a synonym for 'Truth').[62] No matter the terminology used, a general acceptance that intellectualism required a literary foundation coloured these responses. Whether or not that literary foundation could be trusted is another matter.

During the eighteenth century in particular, the primary obstacle in historical and antiquarian research was the dubious integrity of historical sources. *The Poems of Ossian* were not the only authenticity scandal of its time. Even within sources universally acknowledged to be ancient, their particular relation of history instigated sceptical inquiries into the divorcement of fact and fable. Unreliable is the ancient practice of attributing 'fable' and 'superstition' as their causal authorities. Furthermore, the dearth of records complicates efforts to form a progressive chain of events, and when conflicts arose between surviving accounts, nothing else existed to determine the truth. Indeed, for all that

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[58] Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment,* pp. 51-2.
[59] Smith, 'Lecture XVII', *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres,* p. 90.
[60] Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 48
[61] John Pinkerton, *Enquiry into the History of Scotland preceding the Reign of Malcolm III,* (London: John Nichols, 1789), pp. ix-xii.
[62] Dalrymple, *Annals of Scotland,* pp. iii-v

eighteenth-century writers sought the truth, they were increasingly aware of how difficult that might be.

Complications with Textual Sources

Both before and after the Ossianic controversy, a number of notable forgeries had taken place. Elizabeth, Lady Wardlaw had said to have found the old Scots ballad 'Hardyknute' locked in the vaults in Dunfermline, the site of a medieval monastery.[63] In England, Thomas Chatterton had claimed to have found medieval poems, ostensibly written by a monk named Thomas Rowley, in a Bristol Church. Adding to the veracity of his claim was the fact that fifteenth century deeds and charters had been kept in the church until they were collected by Chatterton's father.[64] Even Pinkerton, one of the loudest critics of Macpherson, had composed a fake sequel to 'Hardyknute' in an effort to prove the poem as authentic.[65] Many of these forgers had employed simple methods. Chatterton aged his forged medieval manuscripts by curling vellum over a candle and rubbing yellow ochre on the page to discolour it. Many of his manuscripts were 'aged' to the point of illegibility, conveniently allowing only Chatterton to transcribe them.[66] *The Poems of Ossian*, which appeared after Hardyknute but before Rowley, appeared to be just one more in a succession of forgeries.[67]

As demonstrated, a concerted effort was made on the part of the literati to deconstruct human nature through authentic representations of human activity over the millennia. What needs to be acknowledged is how these efforts were complicated by undependable primary sources. As discussed in the last chapter, textual sources had an authority that oral sources lacked; the physicality of the document and the difficulty in altering the text made textual sources stable foundations. That said, the perceived ignorance of their writers made them susceptible to irrational elements such as fable and superstition. Ferguson saw the danger in confusing fiction for history and lamented that fact that fiction was taken as the only evidence of historical genius.[68] Where fiction could

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[63] Russett, *Fictions and Fakes*, p. 5

[64] Haywood, *The Making of History*, pp. 121-2.

[65] Ibid, pp. 117-8.

[66] Groom, *The Forger's Shadow*, p. 148.

[67] Within Scotland, forgeries were perceived to be such a common occurrence that Scotland became associated with forgery, prompting Johnson to famously remark that Scots 'loved Scotland better than the truth.' It should be noted, however, that Chatterton was not Scottish.

[68] Ferguson, *History of Civil Society,* p. 128.

illuminate the historical imagination of a nation, it was insufficient to relate facts, and it was easily confused for more 'authentic' representations.

History, as a genre, was generally undergoing scrutiny during this period, particularly within the Scottish mind-set, as authors struggled to come to terms with the nebulous origins of the nation. William Robertson divided Scottish historiography into four distinct periods. The first period, which begins with the very origins of Scotland up until the reign of Kenneth II, was that 'of pure fable and conjecture', and the second period, between Kenneth II and Alexander III, was drawn from truthful accounts but without serious inquiry from contemporary observers. The third period, between Alexander III and James V, is of interest because it is the first period where 'authentic' history can be found.[69] Robertson calls it authentic because the historical record not only transcribes events but explicates the causes of the events and the 'manners of men' within that age. He recommends that all serious historical inquiry begins with historiography originating during this third stage. Anything written before it cannot be verified within rational inquiry. Therefore, 'authentic' history requires both sequential accounts and authorial causal analysis from within the time period in question. For this reason, histories regarding the earliest inhabitants of Scotland—the Picts and Dàl Riata—are often confined to lists of bare historical facts. John Belfour, in his 1770 *A New History of Scotland*, records early Scottish history like a genealogy:

> [Aidan] was succeed in 604 by Conval's son Keneth, who reigning but twelve months, the crown came next to Eugene, Aidan's son, who enjoyed it peaceably sixteen years. It is then devolved on his eldest son, Ferchard, who destroyed himself in a dungeon, to which his subjects, on account of his vicious life, had confined him.*[70]*

In his introduction, Belfour describes the corrupting power of tradition in its distortion of history, and his straightforward rendering of history is meant to 'convey truth and lead to wisdom'.[71] Belfour regains a more narrative approach further on in the text, as he illuminates the lives of each king and queen since David I, but his restraint in the very earliest period of Scottish history demonstrate a strict adherence to the surviving manuscripts of early Scotland.[72] These sources, written documents with verifiable age that had survived in many

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[69] The fourth stage is that when Scottish history becomes inextricable from European politics. *History of Scotland*, p. 5.

[70] John Belfour, 'Introduction', *A New History of Scotland from the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time,* (London: E. and C. Dilly, 1770), p. 3.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Common Scottish primary sources for pre-twelfth century Scotland include the *Senchus Fer nAlban*, a short document that detailed the genealogies and military obligations of the three primary Cenels of Dál

forms since the tenth century, were a source of authority that withstood sceptical grounds.[73] Any other reader could consult the same document and read the same history that Belfour had referenced. Although these documents would prove immeasurable to historians both then and now, they do not provide much insight to the ancient culture of Scotland, and thus most 'histories' relied on speculation and conjecture derived from external sources.

Scotland had a unique problem in that most of its chronicles or charters from the early medieval period had either been removed to Ireland during Norse invasions or had not survived.[74] At least one writer attributed all early Scottish academic endeavours to the Irish, due to this displacement.[75] Both Blair and Belfour blamed Edward I for the destruction of Scottish chronicles.[76] Blair, in particular, laments the bare state of Scottish history until the arrival of John of Fordun in the thirteenth century.[77] This dearth of records complicated the study of early Scottish history for many, and it may explain why some, like Robertson, were hesitant to approach these early periods. Without these sources, how could one accurately depict a pre-thirteenth century Scotland? Some, like Belfour, may have exercised restraint by restricting themselves to the barest facts revealed by the surviving documents. Others, however, desired to fill in the gaps.

How writers chose to approach these chasms varied. The two most relevant procedures involved either a reliance on foreign accounts (which manifested in most cases as a deference to Classical contemporaneous sources) or an insistence on native accounts (which, in Scotland's case, were likely to be derived from oral tradition). Classical sources were plentiful compared to written Scottish accounts and had well-established historiographical traditions, with Herodotus traditionally acknowledged as the first historian.[78] Yet few Classical writers had ever visited the British Isles, and, ironically, some may have depended on oral accounts or fabricated their own travels in order to lend credence

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Riata, and the *Life of St. Columba*, a hagiography by Adomnan. Such sources yielded unsatisfactory insight to the larger operations of Celtic society for eighteenth-century historians.

[73] Bak, Geary, and Klaniczay, 'The Long Shadow of Ossian', p. xviii.

[74] William Ferguson, *The Identity of the Scottish Nation: An Historic Quest* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1998), p. 19.

[75] See David Irvine, *The Lives of the Scottish Poets with Preliminary Dissertations on the Literary History of Scotland* (Edinburgh: David and Boyd, 1810), p. 16.

[76] Blair, *Critical Dissertation*, p. iii; Belfour, *A New History of Scotland,* p. 1.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Shrimpton, *History and Memory in Ancient Greece*, p. 37. It should be noted that this was well-known in the 18th century, as Pinkerton acknowledged this tradition in *Enquiry into the History of Scotland ,* where he describes the Classical period as the 'age of Herodotus' (p. 3) and Adam Smith credited him in 'Lecture XIX' of *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres,* pp. 104-10.

to their depictions of the savage north.[79] Ptolemy's map of Britain, with Scotland skewed ninety degrees off the rest of the island, is an apt metaphor for how some in the Mediterranean may have perceived the British Isles over a thousand years prior. Yet, with the limited resources available in the eighteenth century, these sources were perhaps the only surviving manuscripts that were universally acknowledged to be legitimate. Hume explains the dependency on Classical sources as caused by their secular focus. He states in the *History of England*:

> The fables, which are commonly employed to supply the place of true history, ought entirely to be disregarded; or if any exception be admitted to this general rule, it can only be in favour of the ancient Grecian fictions, [which] are so celebrated and agreeable, that they will ever be the objects of the attention of mankind.'[80]

This Classical exceptionalism, as applied to Greek 'fables', precludes most sources of British history originating from Britain itself.

Despite this common exclusion of British sources, many writers delighted in the application of Classical examples to draw comparisons between ancient Scottish and Grecian texts. Smith cites Homer as the premier example of the early poet-historians, the model to which all other barbaric poets attempt to emulate.[81] It can be even argued that some tried to borrow the prestige of Classical elements for their own works. For example, antiquarian Alexander Campbell wrote 'A Conversation on Scottish Song', a Socratic debate between two men named Alexis and Lycidas. Alexis is likely a Greek styling of the author's own name, and it is Alexis who educates Lycidas on the genius of ancient Highland poetry.[82] While the characters Campbell created are not found in Classical repertoire, they represent the authority that a Classical presence bears in historical and artistic debates.

Not all agreed with the neo-Classical establishment. Horace Walpole offers a different perspective on the tendency towards Greek sources in historical writing. In a letter to William Robertson, he advises Robertson to write a history on Charles V instead of the Greek nation, as Walpole believed that a native's perspective was not as likely to contain mistakes. He states: 'Greece, indeed, is a foreign country; but no Greek is alive to

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[79] J.F. Killeen, 'Ireland in the Greek and Roman Writers', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature,* 76 (1976), p. 210.

[80] David Hume, *History of England: From the invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, Vol. 1. (Liberty Classics, 1985), p. 4

[81] Smith, 'Lecture XIX', in *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. by J.C. Bryce, (Broadbridge: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 104.

[82] 'A Conversation on Scottish Song', in *A History of the Poetry of Scotland,* (Edinburgh: Andrew Foulis, pp. 1-28.

disprove one.'[83] In other words, due to both the physical and historical distance of the Greek and Roman empires, no extant scholar could definitively prove these scholars wrong. John Lawrie, who wrote *The History of the Wars in Scotland*, scorned the fact that many Scots learned Greek and Roman history without ever learning Scottish or British history.[84] Yet Lawrie employs Classical historical notes as a point of reference in this history, illustrating the necessity for these sources, both as a common point of knowledge for his audience but also as an authorial statement within his text. Indeed, he has little choice, as native sources were limited.

Poets as Historians

Through the debates examined in this chapter, certain trends appear. An interest in the legitimisation of social theories converged with a need for verifiable written sources from ancient eras, a desire to empirically map historical processes, and a general public interest in the historical origins of society. Greek and Roman texts, with their strains of humanism and common interests in natural truth and history, conveniently supply an ancient point of reference for writers, and they exist in relative abundance.[85] Yet, as Lawrie and Walpole demonstrate, some recognised the danger of dependency on these historical texts. Hume did utilise native accounts in *History of England*, but England had more surviving chronicles from the early medieval period.[86] Native Scottish accounts of history, however, relied on what was often characterised as illiterate and 'rude' tribes.

Where 'rude cultures' lacked sophisticated methods of recording history, they did have one thing in abundance: poetry. Adam Smith declared that 'poets were the first historians of any.'[87] Blair, one of the most fervent supporters of Ossian's authenticity, believed that primitivism catalysed genius:

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[83] In Dugald Stewart, ed. *The Works of William Robertson, D.D.,* (London: T. Cadell, 1817), p. 197.

[84] John Lawrie, *The History of the Wars in Scotland, from the Battle of the Grampian Hills in the year 85, to the Battle of Culloden in the Year 1746,* (Edinburgh: W. Darling, 1783), pp. 2-3.

[85] Allan, *Virtue, Learning, and the Scottish Enlightenment,* p. 44. Allan also argues that it was primarily Ciceronian humanism that informed the attraction for Classical sources, but his argument primarily addresses the writing of history in the later medieval and renaissance periods. It does not address at length the conceptualization of early medieval and ancient Scotland, which lacked the historians that Allan so heavily cites.

[86] Hume heavily cites the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Bede for his early history of England. See *History of England*, Vol. 1.

[87] Adam Smith, 'Lecture. XIX.', *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, p. 104.

> For many circumstances of those times which we call barbarous, are favourable to the poetical spirit. That state, in which human nature shoots wild and free, though unfit for other improvements, certainly encourages the high exertions of fancy and passion.[88]

Yet poets were not considered to be good or truthful historians. As Smith describes, ancient poets were prone to fable and exaggeration. Every war was an epic battle; every soldier was a legendary hero; all events were attributed to the providence of their gods.[89] Even in beloved Classical texts, these fabulous elements were so entangled that many antiquarians and historians struggled to extricate fact from fiction.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of poets was the absence of objectivity. In Classical mythology, poets derived their inspiration from the muses, and thus a divine spirit infused their poems, granting them a mythical authority. In a Scottish context, Robertson believed, for example, that Scottish history relied upon 'uncertain legends and the traditions of the bards, still more uncertain.'[90] A historian, however, was bound to the truth where a poet's most pressing duty was to delight his audience.[91] Poets were, therefore, prone to the inauthentic, the fabled, and the irrational. Smith attributed the poet's fable and wonder as a symptom of ignorance, thus implying that in an advanced society where science and reason had taken root, there was no room for it. Those, who in his own time, consumed such works were referred to as the 'ignorant vulgar'.[92] Thus, the poet's dangerous temptation to manipulate the 'truth' for entertainment would always cloud the sceptic's reception of the poem.

The prevalence of Classical poetry in a landscape where the prohibition of poetry from authentic history was so heavily sought may be seen like a paradox. It was just this atmosphere of Classical exceptionalism that posited the largest problem for *The Poems of Ossian*. Some who depended on Classical poetry as evidence of Classical genius which resulted from Classical civilisation extrapolated that same framework to the Highlands after the publication of *The Poems of Ossian*. They applied the same level of genius to a region that was, by its environment, supposedly incapable of producing anything. This indirectly subverted stadial theories and long-held notions of southern cultural dominance in Britain. More dangerously, perhaps, was not that it simply transgressed but that it became so popular

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[88] Blair, *Critical Dissertation,* p. 345.
[89] Ibid, pp. 104-6.
[90] Robertson, *History of Scotland*, p. 2.
[91] Smith, 'Lecture XX', in *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, p. 111.
[92] Ibid.

while doing so. This popularity would seep into the Scottish consciousness, prompting new approaches to long-established history.

It has been stated that Ossianism subverted the historiographical norms described in this chapter, and nowhere is this clearer than in the antiquarian accounts that freely incorporated Ossianic narratives into their construction of history. These antiquarians saw in *The Poems of Ossian* a history that was not moral or didactic but aesthetic and sublime. Herein, *The Poems of Ossian* present its biggest threat. Smith's arguments, while they demonstrate the dangers of relying on poetry for history, do little to actually prevent poetry from becoming part of the Scottish historical narrative. Rather, the bard would become a source of authority himself for new constructions of Scottish history, both ancient and modern.

Chapter Three: Aesthetic History and Romantic Antiquarianism

Published twelve years after the society's founding in 1780, the first volume of the *Transactions of the Society of the Antiquaries of Scotland* praised the efforts of antiquaries in Scotland since the Union. What was missing, the preface claims, was a way to distribute these discoveries to the public.[1] Thus was the purpose behind the Society: to support the endeavours of individual antiquarians while simultaneously providing public access to this research. In this way, antiquarianism would become ingrained in the public imagination. The Society of the Antiquaries of Scotland was not alone in this endeavour. Antiquarianism was a popular pursuit in late eighteenth-century Britain, and the growing taste for antiquity and ancient poetry meant that there was an audience ready to devour what new and exciting discoveries could be produced.[2]

This chapter will demonstrate how the reception of *The Poems of Ossian* transcended the academic community and infiltrated Scottish culture and nation-building. It will demonstrate how *The Poems of Ossian* were adopted as an antiquarian text both as evidence for original genius in early Scotland and as a sublime apparatus for theoretical constructs of the natural man. By adopting poetry as a historical authority, definitions of the authentic shifted from empirical to aesthetic. These antiquarians constructed a new framework of Scottish history where a Gaelicised past, based in a rich bardic heritage, invigorated contention about the true origins of the Scottish people. This chapter will also look at the Gothic school of Scottish history, which denied Celtic genius while adopting many of the same historiographical methods as romantic antiquarians. While genre remains an undefined boundary, certain agreements arise through the use of poetry as a historical authority on the customs, manners, and genius of early Scotland.

The Primitive and the Sublime within the Space of the Nation

The interest in primitivism is often discussed in conjunction with *The Poems of Ossian*'s overwhelming popularity. Stafford has paid particular attention to this element in her works, correlating the eighteenth-century epopee and primitive motifs in the *Sublime Savage*.[3] John Dwyer looked at the rehabilitation of the bardic and warrior cultures within the scheme of eighteenth-century intellectual culture in 'The Melancholy Savage'.[4] Dafydd

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[1] William Smellie, 'An Historical Account of the Society of the Antiquaries of Scotland', in *Transactions of the Society of the Antiquaries of Scotland,* (Edinburgh: William and Alex, Smellie, 1792), p. iv.
[2] McLane, *The Making of British Romantic Poetry*, pp. 50-1.
[3] Fiona Stafford, *The Sublime Savage,* pp. 77-97.
[4] John Dwyer, 'The Melancholy Savage', pp. 164-206.

Moore has also embraced it within *Enlightenment and Romance*.[5] A brief survey of these texts reveal the depth of the association between savage imagery and *The Poems of Ossian*, with particular attention paid to Hugh Blair's treatment of the poems in his lectures and dissertations. While Hugh Blair is perhaps the most prominent supporter of *The Poems of Ossian* —and his writings show the greatest depth of thought concerning its authenticity and aesthetic value—the concept of the primitive man had a wide appeal in the later eighteenth century. The reception of *The Poems of Ossian* correlated the bard with the unrestrained passion and emotive intelligence that were increasingly associated with primitive cultures.

Two distinct but related ideas become entwined within Ossianic imagery. The first is the primitivist construction of the natural man. Jean-Jacques Rousseau first defined this natural state in his *Discourse on Inequality* (1755). He addressed the complexities of historical research, beseeching fellow man: 'Oh Man, listen whatever be your country and your opinions: here, as I have read it, is your history, not in the books of your fellow men, who lie, but in nature which never lies.'[6] Eschewing his contemporaries' need for tracing the origins of man, Rousseau declared his interest in the social constructions which restricted man from his true nature. These structures not only cause what he called moral or political inequality but prevent people from achieving happiness due to these inequalities.[7] Property and commerce—the familiar last stages of an advanced society—were deemed to be oppressors and the cause of vice.[8]

The second pertinent concept is that of the Burkean sublime. Published two years after Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*, Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) defined the sublime as follows: 'Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime;* that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.' The sublime would become associated with the chaotic elements of the natural and supernatural.

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[5] Dafydd Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance,* p.
[6] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, trans. Franklin Philip (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 25.
[7] Ibid. p. 23.
[8] Ibid. p. 43.

Sublime literature and primitivism were discrete ideas that were frequently associated with one another. Because the primitive man had a limited understanding of the mechanics of the world, it was thought by some that it was natural he would view the world through a sublime lens. Hugh Blair described the 'infancy of societies' as one in which humans encountered foreign objects with such wonder that they were bound to describe them in term in extreme language, which was, by its nature, poetical.[9] Like Blair, antiquarians flirted with a conceptualisation of the past that was as literary as it was historical.[10] History became an aesthetic. David Duff argued that the genres developing in the midst of this movement were 'were defined not by their "rules", but by their origins, their history, their ethnic associations, their genealogy.' [11] *The Poems of Ossian* were a catalysing force in this trend. As Chapter One argued, the prose outright defied the staid structure and regulated verse of neoclassical poetry. These poems were a symbol of the self-reflexive romantic myth that literature had broken free of its traditional fetters and returned to the wondrous state of ancient poetry. This, in itself, has hallmarks of Rousseau's philosophy, where art has been repressed under the weight of rigid Classical decorum. But as Duff explains, this was indeed a myth, and Romantics themselves were prone to adopting traditional and Classical elements as it suited them.[12]

What is implied, however, is that Romantics engaged in a type of myth-making. Here, the historical supplied an extra-temporal framework in which mankind could indulge his natural passions, even as he benefited from modern institutions and civility. Porter suggests that while primitivism was rising in taste, a conflict ensued 'between the "primitive" virtues of an '"uncivilised" society and the refined taste that was a necessary ingredient to both art and morality.'[13] Blair, in *Dissertations on the Poems of Ossian*, outlined the many ways which *The Poems of Ossian* fulfilled this natural state. For Blair, ancient poetry 'present to us, what is much more valuable than the history of such transactions as a rude age can afford, the history of human imagination and passion.'[14] Where the history of nations and institutions had tangible records, the history of ideas was an abstraction, albeit one that was no less real than the more palpable qualities of historical research.[15]

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[9] See Hugh Blair, *A Critical Dissertation*, pp. 345.
[10] See Russett's examination of Thomas Percy in *Fictions and Fakes,* pp. 126-30.
[11] David Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 145.
[12] Ibid, pp. 20-1.
[13] Porter, 'Bring me the Head of Macpherson', p. 402
[14] Blair, *Critical Dissertation*, p. 345.
[15] Allan, *Virtue, Learning, and the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 160-9.

Where textual history previously provided an authority from the past to inform historical writing, now poetic genius became encoded in the idea of the ancient and epic. This genius, which embodied the pathetic and sublime elements of the human experience, was considered to be heightened within a pre-commercial society, wherein fabricated structures of law and economy could not inhibit human passion. William Duff, in *An Essay on Original Genius*, spoke of original genius arising from the primitive man: 'they are the dictates of nature, unmixed and undisguised.'[16] In line with Rousseau's philosophy on the corruption of modern society, primitivism provided a venue for the natural state of man and his passions—notions which derived not from artificial institutions but authentic expressions of the human condition. Thus, as Duff describes, these poems show 'artless and tender loves, generous friendships, and warlike exploits [that] compose the history of this uncultivated period.'[17] Primitive poetry was capable of transmitting authentic history because it lacked the artificial proscriptions that modern society placed on mankind; these arbitrary strictures would, in Duff's theory, reduce the authority of modern interpretations and understandings of human nature.

Like Duff, many antiquarians referred to *The Poems of Ossian* as artless, a compliment meant to highlight their lack of artifice. William Tytler described Scottish songs as 'wild pathetic sweetness', 'artless simplicity', 'void of all art'.[18] They are 'flights of genius, devoid of art, they bid defiance to artificial races and affected cadences.'[19] Blair referred to the early periods of human history as the 'most artless ages' and emphasised the importance of poetry in transporting the wonder and liberation of those eras.[20] Campbell, when citing Scottish songs within his works, would comment on their 'plaintive wildness'.[21] According to this idea, because early poetry lacked contrivance, the poem was, therefore, authentic in its message of the human experience in earlier ages.

This concept of poetry as a historical witness transcends genre. History was no longer just a tool for instruction or entertainment but as a means of interpreting the material realm of the nation. Travel literature is a good example of how history could be experienced outside of an academic context. Travelogues, such as Alexander Campbell's *A Journey from Edinburgh through Parts of Northern Britain* and James Hall's *Travels*

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[16] William Duff, *An Essay on Original Genius; and its Various Modes of Exertion in Philosophy and the Fine Arts, Particularly in Poetry*, (London: E. and C. Dilly, 1767), pp. 269-70.
[17] Ibid.
[18] William Tytler, "Dissertation on Scottish Music" in *Transactions*, p. 469-71.
[19] Ibid. p. 495.
[20] Blair, *A Critical Dissertation*, p. 346.
[21] Campbell, *A Journey from Edinburgh*, p. 71.

Through Scotland, contained not just observations of their journey but historical notes and excerpts of local song. Where historians depended largely on textual manuscripts and where antiquarians collected artefacts, travel writers interacted with the physical space within which history had occurred as a way of representing their own movement within that space. Campbell's preface defined the purpose of his journey as a native's perspective into the local history, a perspective lost by the outsiders who sought to constrain Scottish history within their own narrow viewpoints.[22] Hall described his historicism as an amusement and described how he passed time on his journey by comparing:

> Local improvements, the notions, customs, and follies of the people, with what they are represented to have been in former times; with those existing at present in a sister kingdom; and to make, if I could, from the comparisons that might occur, some observations of a practical and useful nature.[23]

These observations, culled from personal experiential travel, grant the physical landscape of the nation with a historical authority of its own. Thus, one needs not just to read manuscripts or handle antiquities but to experience of the space of the nation.

What is seen in these examples is how romantic historicism became part of the national experience. Recent scholarship has examined how a localised past influenced the collective memory of the nation by funnelling eighteenth-century experiences through a historical perspective. By situating historical events within their geographic space and corroborating their accounts with local, oral testimonies, a modern civic identity could be scoped within the familiar boundaries of the Scottish nation. Where those such as Smith and Dalrymple sought the authentic within manuscripts and chains of causality, these antiquarians sought the authentic within a reconstructed genealogy of local memory. Nick Groom attempts to explain this characteristic of antiquarian research:

> *Ossian*, as the embodiment of a 'natural' oral tradition, shares the Socratic and anti-Johnsonian, distrust of letters: they are destructive to memory and therefore truth-- the Muses were in fact the daughters of Mnemosyne, or Memory. *Ossian*

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[22] Alexander Campbell, *A Journey from Edinburgh through parts of North Britain Containing Remarks on Scottish Landscape; and Observations on Rural Economy, Natural History, Manufactures, Trade, and Commerce,* (London, A Strahan, 1802), pp. iii-iv. 'It appeared to me, notwithstanding the numerous writers that of late have directed their attention to the examination of the antiquities, natural history, peculiar customs and manners of the northern section of our island, that many things had escaped their diligence of research, which a native intimately acquainted with the classic ground and historical incidents thereto belonging, as well as with many traditional particulars about sink into that oblivion from which they are now snatched, might have it in his power to examine more at leisure than any stranger, how accurate so ever, traversing hastily the varous districts described in the following journey.'

[23] James Hall, *Travels in Scotland by an Unusual Route with a Trip to the Orkneys and Hebrides Containing Hints for Improvement in Agriculture and Commerce*, (London: J. Johnson, 1807), p. 1.

effectively proposes then a version of authenticity differently calibrated from that of the written text.[24]

This approach invests authority and authenticity into mediums traditionally categorised as fiction or fable. This mnemonic poiesis was often curated within geopolitical boundaries as a way of endorsing what Pittock calls the 'taxonomy of glory' for the nation or, as Trumpener puts it, 'to stress the primacy of national institutions rather than the imagination of individual writers.'[25] Margaret Russett asserts that these debates were not as focused on historic authenticity so much as they were on 'authentic subjectivity'. For all that many writers claimed an authentic element in their own writing, they themselves were prone to the inauthentic, and thus authenticity was not a universal truth so much as it was a spectrum of interpretation and self-expression.[26]

The liberation from rigid artistic repression could be fully appreciated in an unconventional text like *The Poems of Ossian*. Beyond its construction, however, *The Poems of Ossian* provide a convenient marriage of modern introspection and civility packaged within an antique framework of warriors and bards. It anticipates the Romantic Movement while providing a legitimising historical authority for its earliest artists.

The Poems of Ossian as a Model

Stafford has argued that despite the protests of some Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, the Romantic Movement was deeply indebted to *The Poems of Ossian* in terms of influence and inspiration.[27] There were other forces at work of course. The popularity of Gothic writers like Horace Walpole was rising, and Burke and Rousseau were widely read. This section proposes that *The Poems of Ossian* were a romantic prototype that provided the public with a literary model that had been proposed by Rousseau and Burke, among others. By begetting one of the earliest sublime archetypes within an evocative and violent landscape, *The Poems of Ossian* managed to realign Scottish expectations of the past and present. *The Poems of Ossian* provided a perfect model for antiquarian research in the same way that they would catalyse the archetypal romantic poem. Their historicist qualities blend ancient scenes with modern sensibility. This romantic historicism is

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[24] Groom, *The Forger's Shadow*, p. 126.

[25] Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 71; Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, p. 78.

[26] Russett, 'Genuity or Ingenuity?', p. 49.

[27] Fiona Stafford, 'Dangerous Success: Ossian, Wordsworth, and English Romantic Literature,' in *Ossian Revisited*, pp. 49-72 (pp. 52-3).

often identified with later years of the movement, although there is ample evidence that *The Poems of Ossian* would provide an early generic mould.

 The Poems of Ossian conjured a sublime terrain within a familiar Scottish landscape, and its ambiguous temporality placed it within antiquity even as it conjured modern sentiment. *The Poems of Ossian* were among the most successful manifestations of the sublime, appearing a mere six years after Burke's famous essay. It fulfilled, in many ways, a public demand for the growing interest in the sublime, which Stafford attributes, in part, for its sudden popularity.[28] Blair's lectures reveal a deep-seated interest in the sublime elements of nature. The third lecture of *Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* focused on sublimity and the elements in language and literature which best produce it. He asks, 'what are the scenes of nature that elevate the mind in the highest degree and produce the sublime sensation? Not the gay landscape, the flowery field, or the flourishing city; but the hoary mountain, and the solitary lake; the aged forest, and the torrent falling over the rock.'[29] This language is practically lifted from *The Poems of Ossian*. These images associate the sublime with the terrible and unrestrained while distancing it from the cultivated and civilised tableau that defined poetry earlier in the century.

 Ossian's primary audience in many of the poems is the 'lonely dweller of the rock'.[30] Fingal is described 'like a dark and stormy cloud, edged round with the red lightening of heaven, and flying westward from the morning's beam.'[31] Amidst battle in *Temora*, 'a distant sun-beam marks the hill. The dusky waves of the blast fly over the fields of grass.'[32] This natural imagery does not stand apart from the events of the book, nor do they merely create the space within which the characters act. Rather, nature informs their actions. It is an aspect of the self, of the battle, of the soul. Thus the sublime effuses through the text, not just creating an atmosphere but actively associating each agent and action as a product. Ossian himself held roles of the warrior and bard, an important element as it situates him as both a participant in the historical story and as an interpreter of the events. The savagery of a primitive warrior was, in many cases, softened by the self-reflections and

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[28] Ibid,, p. 32.
[29] Hugh Blair, 'Sublimity in Objects', in *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belle Lettres,* (London: A. Strahan, 1787), p. 62.
[30] Macpherson, 'Calthon and Colmol: A Poem', *The Poems of Ossian*, p. 171
[31] Macpherson, 'Fingal Book IV', *The Poems of Ossian*, p. 85.
[32] Macpherson, 'Temora: Book III', *The Poems of Ossian*, p. 246

sentimentality of the bard, a curious overlap that instigated both admiration and scepticism towards the poems. Writers at the time may have identified primitivism with a more callous, unforgiving image of men, where Ossian spoke of these brutal warriors with a very modern sense of feeling and emotion.[33]

Ossian's effusions of solitude and his state as the last of his line underlie Romantic perceptions of the self. This is often considered the most modern aspect of *The Poems of Ossian*; this notion derives from the concept that such pathos was incompatible within a pre-modern society. Regardless of whether or not earlier societies were capable of such sentimentality, many perceived it to be so in this period. Ossian opens many of his poems with an address to the 'lonely dweller of the rock', the silent listening culdee whose presence within the poems only serves to provide Ossian a sounding board for his own laments. The 'Battle of Lora' begins:

> Son of the distant land, who dwellest in the secret cell! Do I hear the sounds of thy grove? Or is it the voice of thy songs? The torrent was loud in my ear, but I heard a tuneful voice; dost thou praise the chiefs of thy land; or the spirits of the wind?—But lonely dweller of the rock! Look over that heathy plain: thou seest green tombs, with their rank, whistling grass, with their stones of mossy heads; thou seest them, son of the rock, but Ossian's eyes have failed.[34]

Through his storytelling, Ossian imagines what the culdee sees to emphasise both his own loss of sight and his dependency on his decaying mimetic faculties. Ossian cannot see the landscape; he can only remember it.[35] His 'sight' cannot perceive the present, and it is stripped of its prophetic power. Isolated from the present, he shares his stories with the culdee to 'see' the past. The culdees were a particular type of monk who isolated themselves in pursuit of spiritual improvement.[36] Thus, the culdee is not even an active figure within society. He, in many ways, represents the solitude and self-imprisonment of Ossian himself, who is estranged by time from the company of his youth and blind to the ageing qualities of the land around him. Ossian has only his voice and his ears; his duty is no longer to witness but to transmit. Yet, in these particular poems, as he speaks to the culdee, it is not the

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[33] Dwyer, 'The Melancholy Savage', p. 168
[34] Macpherson, 'The Battle of Lora', *The Poems of Ossian*, p. 119
[35] "…the memories that fall upon [Ossian's] inward eye are more real to him than his present bare and melancholy surroundings." Womack, *Improvement and Romance*, p.100.
[36] Craig Haggart, 'Feidlimid mac Crimthainn and the "Óentu Maíle Ruain"', *Studia Hibernica*, 33 (2005), 29-59 (p. 30).

monk to whom he speaks but himself. As Ossian himself admits, it is uncertain whether or not the culdee is even present.

The romantic construction of the self, so apparent in Ossian's laments, ground it within the modern interpretation of the human spirit, as packaged within the genius of a particular writer. These concepts lend themselves easily to the fiction of the period, but they are confined to realms of fiction. Indeed, romantic tropes begin appearing in the academic realm, with the development of Romantic antiquarianism.

The Rise of Romantic Antiquarianism

Founded in 1780 with signatories that included Lord Kames, James Boswell, and Hugh Blair, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland had impressive credentials. Their first president was the Earl of Bute, and by 1792, their collection of antiquities reached an astonishing 16,000 pieces.[37] Antiquarians became associated with the retrieval and revitalisation of antiquities. This approach was not purely focused on material culture, as many within the society expressed interests in Scottish musical and literary history.[38] In their first published volume of transactions, the group pled with their countrymen for contributions:

> Every Scotsman is called to favour the design and contribute his share of information to them, that, under their eye, our ancient history may be rescued from the reveries of the theorist and the dictates of national vanity, and as just information be obtained, as the state of facts and the nature of the inquiry can admit.[39]

Antiquarianism was no longer the providence of the isolated academic; it was a national duty.

A shift in historical thought was also taking root across Europe. Cultural identity was no longer sought in the progressive urban centres, as it had been in the renaissance period, but in the rural peasant villages, which were perceived within a nostalgic lens to have preserved 'authentic' customs unique to their respective nations.[40] Here a popular resistance is seen against the universal application of conjectural history. This resistance is

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[37] Smellie, *Transactions of the Antiquaries of Scotland*, p.iii.
[38] See 'Dissertation on Scottish Music' by William Tytler (pp.469-495) and 'An Inquiry into the Origin of the Name of the Scottish Nation' by Sir James Foulis of Colinton (pp.1-11), both in *Transactions of the Antiquaries of Scotland.*
[39] Ibid, p. 250.
[40] Angela Byrne, *Geographies of the Romantic North*, p. 43.

most clearly delineated in the *Transactions*, where the theorist is characterised as a dreamer.

What is unclear about the *Transactions* is that they also wish to free themselves from the 'the dictates of national vanity'. This undefined term is loaded with connotation in the post-union, post-Jacobite period. Which nation did they refer? To Scotland, that conflicted land where Scots 'love Scotland better than truth'?[41] Or to Great Britain, the unified state that was in danger of losing its own past?[42] While ultimately undefined, this language indicates the nebulous nature of the nation amidst the growing nostalgia for a past rooted in the grandiose, the heroic, and the sublime. Pittock counts this 'taxonomy of glory' as something that needed to be repressed in Scotland due to its subversion of the Union, and he argues that certain trends in the academic sphere—such as Blair's appointment to the Regius Chair of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres—acted to mould Scotland within a 'unitary British model'.[43] These undercurrents of assimilation had been running since the Union itself and were exacerbated by the Jacobite Rebellions and the legislature that followed.[44]

That said, the taste for *The Poems of Ossian* were still growing, as was the interest in both the sublime and primitive elements of nature. Within three months of the original publication of *Fragments* in 1760, French translations appeared in *Journal etranger*, with a particular interest on the poems' primitive similarities to Biblical and Classical verse.[45] Tourists would begin to visit sites associated with Ossian, such as his supposed grave in the Narrow Glen or the mirror-plated Ossian's Hall in Dunkeld.[46] Furthermore, the success of *The Poems of Ossian* prompted a spate of 'ancient' anthologies to flood the market; these included Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), Charlotte Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1789), and Joseph Ritson's *Ancient Songs* (1790).[47] William Godwin published his own translation of a Celtic bard in 1784 with *Imogen: A Pastoral Romance*. *Imogen* was the supposed translation of a Welsh bard named Cadwallo, and its dense prose-poetry form and heavily stylistic representations of the bard in nature

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[41] Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland,* p. 119.
[42] Byrne, *Geographies of the Romantic North,* p. 43.
[43] Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*, p. 71.
[44] Sher, *Church and University*, pp. 37-44.
[45] Colin Smethurst, 'Chateaubriand's Ossian', in *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*, pp. 126-142.
[46] Paul Westover, *Necromanticism: Travelling to Meet the Dead, 1750-1860, (*Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 117.
[47] Joep Leerssen, 'Ossian and the Rise of Literary Historicism,' in *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*, pp. 109-125 (p. 111).

draw clear influence from *The Poems of Ossian*, which Godwin cited in the Preface.[48] The popularity of the poems would also spur several non-Scottish writers to travel to see Ossian's haunts, including Thomas Pennant, Samuel Johnson, and Dorothy and William Wordsworth.[49] Pennant's descriptions of the Highlands included an 'Account of Some Superstitions Practiced in the in the Highlands of Scotland', such as the drawing of a circle with an oak sapling so to chase away fairies.[50] Such a diverse (and at times, sensational) range of literary output indulged the public's growing interest in Ossianic themes, superstitions, mythologies, and ballads.[51]

Antiquarians in this period did not just borrow Ossianic themes; they cite *The Poems of Ossian* as a historical source. James Foulis of Colinton lamented that the 'Gaelic muse' never recorded the drinking habits of the first Caledonians.[52] In his 'Dissertation on Scottish Music', William Tytler began the history of Scottish music with the assertion that 'the genius of the Scots has, in every way, shone conspicuous in poetry and music. *The Poems of Ossian*, composed in an age of rude antiquity, are sufficient proof.'[53] Colin MacKenzie, in '"An Account of Some Remains of Antiquity in the Island of Lewis, one of the Hebrides', identified Ossian's 'horrid circle of Brumo' as a Lewis stone circle.[54] In both *A History of the Poetry of Scotland* and *A Journey from Edinburgh through Parts of North Britain,* Campbell devotes slavish attention to proving the authenticity of Ossian, and then uses that foundation as a springboard to explicating Celtic history from *The Poems of Ossian* itself. He defends this in the Preface to *A Journey:* 'In drawing a contrast of the character of the ancient Caledonians and the Highlanders of the present day, I have

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[48] William Godwin, *Imogen: A Pastoral Romance*, in *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*, Vol. 2, ed. Pamela Clemit, (London: William Pickering, 1992), pp. 169-267. It is interesting to note that Katie Trumpener suggests that through *Imogen*, Godwin is attempting to replace Homer with Ossian as the 'foundational figure' in literature. See Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, p. 108.

[49] Westover, *Necromanticism*, pp. 45-6.

[50] 'Account of some superstitions practised in the Highlands of Scotland, from the 2d. part of Mr PENNANT'S TOUR', *Edinburgh Review* (June 1776), p. 245.

[51] These themes were so ubiquitous in British culture that Byron even parodied the fervor in 1809 with *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*:

> Still must I hear? — shall hoarse Fitzgerald bawl
> His creaking couplets in a tavern hall,
> And I not sing, lest, haply, Scotch reviews
> Should dub me scribbler, and denounce my muse?

[52] James Foulis, "An Inquiry into the Beverage of the Ancient Caledonians , and other northern nations, at their feasts, and of their Drinking Vessels", in *Transactions*, p. 13.

[53] "Dissertation on Scottish Music" in *Transactions*, p. 469.

[54] '"An Account of Some Remains of Antiquity in the Island of Lewis, one of the Hebrides', in *Transactions*, p. 283.

thrown out a few hints relative to the poetry common to Ireland and the Hebrides, in which the Fingalians of both nations are celebrated.'[55]

In these cases, textual hints from *The Poems of Ossian* relating to material culture or arts of the age are taken as evidence; this necessitates a belief on behalf of the writer that *The Poems of Ossian* were authentically transmitted and translated from their ancient origins. What is more interesting, perhaps, though is the aesthetic merit granted to these historical elements. History, in these accounts, is not just a recitation of dry events, nor does it come with the purpose to advance moral or political agendas. Rather, history, itself, represents the sublime, and its most primitive elements are conducive to ideas of the natural man. What is gained from these sources is not merely a glimpse into ancient drinking habits or stone circles but an attempt to deduce the value of these elements as represented through the art of antiquity.

As described earlier in the chapter, these antiquarians are grasping at the historical basis for original genius or the natural man, where poetry, as the product of unrestrained passion, provides an 'authentic' representation of the period. It is authentic because it is primitive, and it lacks the trappings of modern political institutions, particularly the Whiggish representation of history that had remained dominant in the Enlightenment. By looking at the nation in its earliest ages, perhaps a truer picture of the nation could be found. It is this process of discovery that incited antiquarians to retrieve, preserve, and interpret Scottish artefacts.

Geographies of the Past and Present

It is a curious spectacle that occurred in the eighteenth century when the locus of Scottish identity shifted from the Lowlands, where it had been since about the fourteenth century, to the Highlands. In defining the development of this Highlandism movement, Murray Pittock has identified Ossianism as the primary stage.[56] This revised Gaelic history caused cultural conflict between Ireland and Scotland, with each nation attesting to ownership of the Ossianic tradition, an interesting indication of the cultural value invested in the Fionn Cycle.[57]

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[55]Campbell, *A Journey from Edinburgh, p.* vi. See also Campbell, *The History of Poetry in Scotland*, pp. 1-28.

[56] Murray Pittock, *Scottish Nationality*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 85.

[57] O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbaric Nations*, p. 101.

The geography of *The Poems of Ossian* proved to be a contentious subject. Macpherson's own argument was that Ireland had formed from a Scottish colony, a theory which opposed the more accepted notion that Dàl Riata had been an Irish colony in Scotland.[58] By provoking the long-held assumptions about the origin myths of the Irish nation, Macpherson created some fierce enemies from across the North Channel. Sylvester O'Halloran and Charles O'Conor, Irish antiquarians who contributed to Ireland's own antiquarian nationalism, attributed *The Poems of Ossian* to an ordered, Irish classical tradition that stood in sharp contrast to the chaotic Scottish tribes who supposedly gave an ancient precedent for the violence of the Jacobites.[59] John Macpherson, a writer from the Isle of Skye and a confidante of James Macpherson, blamed O'Conor's dismissal of *The Poems of Ossian* as a product of his 'irascible' nature and 'intemperate rage', portraying the antiquarian as an unreasonable and irrational scholar.[60] John Macpherson asserts that O'Conor's attempts to establish an ancient literary tradition for Ireland was dismantled by Scottish antiquarians such as Thomas Innes (1662-1744) and James Macpherson himself.

John Macpherson's attack on O'Conor is interesting because it illustrates the wrangling between the Scottish and Irish for the rightful ownership of their shared history. Differences between the Scottish and Irish enlightenment led to an epistemological divide between the stadialism of Scottish philosophy and the classical constitutionalism of Irish antiquarianism.[61] During the eighteenth century, the Irish were reconstructing a Milesian genealogy for their political heritage, one which was shaped in some regards by colonial influence.[62] This Milesian myth portrayed the Irish Scots as emigrating from Spain and establishing a classical civilisation of their own, comparable to ancient Rome or Greece.[63] The situation of Dàl Riata as an Irish colony staked Ireland's claim to the artistic heritage of the Scottish Gaels but would have disabused them of any responsibility for the perceived barbaric elements of the Highlanders.

Meanwhile, prominent Scottish scholars characterised the Irish as savage and uncivilised. Scholars like John Pinkerton and David Dalrymple attributed Scotland's own

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[58] James Macpherson, *An Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland,* (Dublin: James Williams, 1771), pp.137-56.

[59] Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity 1689-1830*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 124-6.

[60] John Macpherson, *Critical Dissertations on the Origin, Antiquities, Language, Government, Manners, and Religion, of the Ancient Caledonians, their Posterity the Picts, and the British and Irish Scots,* (Dublin: Boulter Grierson, 1768), p. xxv.

[61] Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past*, pp. 125-6.

[62] O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations*, p 25.

[63] Ibid.

advancement to the non-Gaelic influences that penetrated the nation over time.[64] The efforts of John Macpherson and James Macpherson to unravelling Irish hegemony over the Gaelic cycles may not have been universally accepted, but, for many decades, this idea remained persistent within Scottish historiography. To Belfour, the idea that the Scots descended from the Irish was 'fabulous', and he cautioned his readers to disregard the Irish genealogies for this reason.[65] William Guthrie, a Forfarshire minister, blamed the idea of a Scottish origin on the conceit of the Irish and the Scotophobia of the English. He found Milesian theory to be absurd and unfounded, as the Milesians were portrayed to be orderly and productive and the early Irish were, by the authority of Roman accounts, completely barbarous.[66]

Even in Scotland, however, the settings of *The Poems of Ossian* created some contention among historians and antiquarians alike. On one hand, there were those who believed that Scotland did maintain its own Fenian Cycle, which would align *The Poems of Ossian* with the Irish tradition except for their setting within Scotland and not Ireland. A common defence for this theory was that Morven, Fingal's kingdom, was analogous to the peninsula of Morvern in Lochaber. John Smith supported this theory in 1787, when he published his own translations of Ossianic poetry. Using English footnotes to a Gaelic text, Smith firmly places the poems as part of an authentic Scottish tradition using a philological approach. On Morven, for example, he wrote: 'Mor-bheinn, the name of Fingal's kingdom and residence, is a term of the same import as "Highlands". The name is now confined to a single parish, that of Morven in Argyllshire.'[67] Although the association of Morven with Morvern would be contested, Morvern would become so strongly associated with Fingal's kingdom that some nineteenth-century maps labeled the region as Morven.[68]

On the other hand, the appropriation of *The Poems of Ossian* into the Scottish historical narrative concerned those like Malcolm Laing, who argued that the stories were

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[64] Dalrymple, *Annals of Scotland*, p. 14.
[65] Belfour, *A New History of Scotland,* p. 3.
[66] William Guthrie, *A General History of Scotland: From the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time,* Vol. 1 (London: A. Hamilton, 1767), p. 13.
[67] John Smith, *Sean Dana,* p. 35.
[68] See Norman MacLeod's testimony in cited in Sinclair, *The Poems of Ossian in the Original Gaelic,* pp. 531-2. MacLeod argued that Fingal's kingdom was 'Mor Bheann', which included the whole of the Highlands, whereas the peninsula Morvern is actually known as 'Mor Earran' in Gaelic. It should be noted that neither etymology is accepted today; 'A Mhorbhairne' is the Gaelic place name, with 'Mor' deriving from 'muir' (sea) instead of 'mor' (great). For the nineteenth century maps, see GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, 'History of Morvern, in Highland and Argyll: Map and Description', *A Vision of Britain through Time.* <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/place/16973>.

Irish and not Scottish.[69] The inclusion of particular locations within *The Poems of Ossian* did not escape Laing's notice. Laing contested the Gaelicisation of Scottish place names. He accused Macpherson of misappropriating etymology of places from British, Pictish or Roman sources into an invented Gaelic origin.[70] Sir Walter Scott, in his 1805 review of Laing's edition of *The Poems of Ossian,* also took note with what he believed to be foreign verses hidden within *The Poems of Ossian* and mistaken for Scottish stories by unwitting supporters.[71] The misplacement of the Ossianic poetry endangered the narrative of the Scottish nation.

What is clear from these examples is how the Ossianic bard became a paradigm for heroes of the nation. *The Edinburgh Review*, in a piece titled 'Anecdotes of Scottish Literature', reflected that 'Robert Bruce and Sir William Wallace were remembered with a fond admiration, while the names of the bards who had sung their exploits could with difficulty be discovered.'[72] Where, as was demonstrated in the last chapter, the contribution of poets to ancient history was acknowledged but not praised, the status of the poet rose remarkably in antiquarian circles. References to bards or oral traditions become more frequent. Alexander Campbell treated Wallace and Bruce in this heroic manner, characterising both Wallace and his soldiers as bold liberators of the Scottish nation. He concludes that 'Our poets and historians dwell with admiration on the heroism displayed in the eventful life of the valiant Bruce.'[73] By saying this, Campbell incorporates the role of the poet and historian into the historical story, emphasising the importance of the poet-historians' role not just in the recording of history but in the transmission of transgenerational values and patriotism. The historian's admiration for Wallace complements the heroic language by reiterating the importance and valour invested into this heroic figure. It is contextualising Wallace as an Ossianic hero in his own right.

The idolisation of Wallace was not novel, and Blind Harry's fifteenth-century epic poem laid the basis for the popular conception of Wallace up until the

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[69] Laing, The history of Scotland, Vol. II, p. 379.
[70] Laing, *The History of Scotland,* Vol. II, pp. 380-384.
[71] Walter Scott, 'The Report of the Committee of the Highland Society, Appointed to Enquire into the Nature and Authenticity of *The Poems of Ossian* and Laing's Edition of *The Poems of Ossian'*, *Edinburgh Review* 6 (July 1805), pp. 429-62 (p. 437).
[72] 'Anecdotes of Scottish Literature,' *The Edinburgh Magazine and Review*, (Nov. 1773), p. 5.
[73] Alexander Campbell, *A Journey from Edinburgh*, pp. 37-41.

nineteenth century.[74] Yet Blind Harry himself increasingly gained attributes that were more and more Ossianic. His title of 'The Minstrel' is, as Graeme Morton asserts, a Victorian invention, influenced, no doubt, by the collections of 'minstrelsy' that appeared in the late eighteenth century after the success of *The Poems of Ossian*.[75] What Morton has suggested is that Victorians were seeking to re-evaluate his poem as a history—an idea that is extremely pertinent to the same debates surrounding *The Poems of Ossian* in the previous century. The poet, be it Ossian or Blind Harry, acts as both witness and custodian of the national past.

The curation of 'ancient' poems and ballads sought to quantify these sources within print, and the prestige of the poet would lend itself to a growing literary trope. Furthermore, the collection and preservation of these fragile artefacts became idealised as a national pursuit. Within the popular imagination, these artefacts were sequestered either in an isolated library or within the furtive confines of the Gaelic oral tradition. As David Duff argues, 'in generic terms, Romanticism can thus be defined, as it often has been, as a revival movement: a revival of Romance, of the sonnet, the epic, the ballad, the pastoral, the song, to name just some of its favoured forms. What is important is that in each case an effort of imaginative retrieval is involved.'[76] So far as this applies to antiquarianism, there is a literary element involved, a kind of responsibility placed in the hands of the collector to find examples of authentic original genius and to disseminate this evidence as a characteristic of the nations' origins.

Considering the precarious place of the nation—both in its insecure identity as an individual nation and its uncertain place within the British nation— romantic antiquarianism may have provided some answers to the blank holes in Scottish history. *The Poems of Ossian* assisted antiquarians by providing them with a widely-recognised text that packaged an ancient narrative with sublime genius and modern stylistic liberation. The romanticising of history invested importance into reconstruction of Scotland's past. As *The Poems of Ossian* influenced a western taste for poetic antiquity, they helped legitimise Scottish claims to a unique national past, one that would then create a foundation for its struggling modern identity.

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[74] Graeme Morton, 'The Most Efficacious Patriot: The Heritage of William Wallace in Nineteenth-Century Scotland', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 77.204 (1998), pp. 224-251 (p. 226).
[75] Ibid.
[76] Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre*, p. 145.

Towards a Gothic Origin

It would be remiss to examine the influence of *The Poems of Ossian* without properly addressing the scope and measures of its detractors. In many ways, the rejection of *The Poems of Ossian* influenced the writing of history as much as its acceptance did. While much could be written about the Gothic school in its own right, for the purposes of this chapter, a brief survey of the Gothic (also known as the Teutonic or Germanic) school of historians will be discussed, particularly their incorporation and subsequent rejection of *The Poems of Ossian*. The Gothic school maintained that Lowland Scots, as Anglo-speakers, descended from certain Germanic tribes, either of Gothic or Teutonic association, which gave them a similar pedigree to the English. This theory held that as members of a Gothic race, Lowland Scots inherited the intellect, rationality, and civilisation of their Teutonic ancestors.[77] This would define Lowlanders as a separate and more advanced race compared to the Celtic (read: Gaelic-speaking) Highlanders, whose culture was suspended in a lower stadial order. This Teutonic-Celtic binary would be codified in the nineteenth century through Social Darwinist dogma, but early traces exist through Whiggish racial ideology found within the works of John Pinkerton, David Dalrymple, and other historians.[78] While some engaged the term 'Gothic' and others 'Teutonic', the result is essentially the same. A binary between Germanic and Celtic emerged. An early racial component comprised the difference, with the Germanics bearing standards of industry, intelligence, and letters and the Celts representing barbarism, indolence, and crime.[79]

As demonstrated through the authenticity scandal, the praise heaped upon *The Poems of Ossian* was far from ubiquitous. Yet *The Poems of Ossian*'s growing popularity invested it with a dangerous prestige and influence over its readers. As discussed in chapter two, their claims of antiquity and modern sentiment flouted stadial theories. The focalisation of Scotland with the Highlands defied cultural norms of the last three centuries.[80] By tracing a common ancestry with the English, those who believed in the Gothic origins of Scotland could place the achievements of the Lowland Scots on an equal plane as the English while simultaneously unionising the English and Scots through a

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[77] Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision,* pp. 84.

[78] Colin Kidd, 'Teutonist Ethnology and Scottish Nationalist Inhibition, 1780-1880'*, The Scottish Historical Review,* 74.197 (1995), pp. 45-68 (p. 48).

[79] Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision,* pp. 81-112.

[80] Pittock, *Scottish Nationality*, pp. 14-8.

shared ancestry.[81] It is no wonder that this was seen as a safer unionist alternative to the Celticism proposed by Ossianic versions of the nation.

Celtic historicism would have been seen to promote an inauthentic account of history by glossing over the violence and illiteracy supposedly inherent to its state of civilisation. It was perceived as an anti-intellectual account and one that would benefit criminality in the Highlands by supporting the cultural framework that supported theft and blackmail.[82] In addition to this, Celticism digressed from the Union of 1707 by attracting Scots to an alien form of Scottishness, one that was idealised within Gaelic norms—not English—and was therefore unintelligible to those outside its linguistic community. For these reasons, it was considered transgressive to both the concept of Britain and the intellectual aspirations of the literati.

It is no wonder that alternative theories regarding the origins of the Scots would emerge. In *Annals of Scotland*, David Dalrymple claimed that Picts were Goths; the Irish, Gauls; and the Druids, Phoenicians.[83] If Dalrymple's account is correct, then none of the British ethnic groups have a claim to indigenous status in the Isles, which contravenes the divisive nature of Celticism. John Pinkerton outlined a Gothic origin for the Scots in his *Dissertation on the Origins and Progress of the Scythians and Goths*. He asserted that the Caledonians and Picts, as described by the Romans, referred to a race of Gothic settlers. He would follow up on this theory in *Enquiry Regarding the History of Scotland Preceding Malcolm III*. In the Introduction, he attacked *The Poems of Ossian* and claimed that James Macpherson was the first author the Highlands ever produced, adding:

> Their contempt for the Lowlanders, and reverence for savage manners and customs is striking. The Lowlanders really themselves the ancient Caledonians and amounting to more than a million people, while the Highlanders, an Irish colony, exceed not 400,000, were to lose their history and fame, to gratify the prejudices of these two writers.[84]

In Pinkerton's theory, the composition of *The Poems of Ossian* and the subsequent inclusion of Highland histories into the Scottish narrative constituted an attack on the true Scots—i.e. Lowlanders. Very curious, however, is Pinkerton's staunch defence of 'Hardyknute', a supposedly ancient Scots poem produced in the Lowlands, as evidence of the artistic advancement that Lowlanders had over the Highlanders. Not only was

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[81] Kidd, 'Teutonist Ethnology', p. 50.
[82] Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision*, p. 87.
[83] Dalrymple, *Annals of Scotland*, pp. 14-7.
[84] Pinkerton, *Enquiry Regarding the History of Scotland Preceding Malcolm III,* p. xv

'Hardyknute' itself revealed to be a forgery (and one that predates *The Poems of Ossian* by about fifty years), but for all his defence of history as a science, Pinkerton too relied on a poem as a historical authority.

Pinkerton curated his own collection of ancient Scottish ballads, most of which originated in the Lowlands. Pinkerton expressed that 'it is amusing to observe how expressive the poetry of every country is to its real manners.'[85] He wrote: 'The successors of Ossian were at length employed chiefly in the mean office of preserving fabulous genealogies, and flattering the pride of their chieftains at the expence [sic] of truth, without even fancy sufficient to render their inventions either pleasing or plausible.'[86] In comparison, 'Hardyknute', 'in its original perfection, it is certainly the most noble production in this style that ever appeared in the world.'[87] In many ways, his inclusion of 'Hardyknute' was a historical defence of Lowland literary supremacy over that of the Highlands. Furthermore, Pinkerton would go on to forge a sequel to 'Hardyknute' that he claimed was authentic.[88]

Although Pinkerton's 'Hardyknute' did not catch on, his theories regarding the Gothic Picts were adopted by a number of historians. David Irvine believed that Scotland was settled by external forces. He cited Pinkerton repeatedly in *The Lives of the Scottish Poets* and referred to the Gothic theory of Caledonian origins as 'extremely probable' and 'sufficiently evinced'.[89] In addition, he negated any early writings or academic achievements by the Scottish by stating that any such productions were Irish and not truly Scottish.[90] James Hall, the travel writer who flavoured his accounts with local history, also asserted that the Picts descended from a Gothic origin; this not only separated the Picts from the Celts but excluded them from Roman accounts of the backwardness of the Celts.[91] As the Picts were supposedly the ancestor of the modern Lowland Scots, this placed the Lowlands in a favourably progressive and civilised station compared to the rest of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales.

The reception and adoption of Pinkerton's theories demonstrates a few interesting developments in the historical genre. First, that literature was beginning to be accepted as a

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[85] Pinkerton, *Select Scottish Ballads,* p. xxxvi.
[86] Ibid. p. xxii.
[87] Ibid. p. xii.
[88] See Pinkerton, 'Hardyknute', *Select Scottish Ballads,* (London: J. Nichols, 1783), pp. 1-33.
[89] David Irvine, *Lives of the Scottish Poets with Preliminary Dissertations on the Literary History of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1810), pp. 39-40.
[90] Ibid, p. 16.
[91] Hall, *Travels in Scotland*, pp. 34-6.

historically verifiable source. As discussed in the first and second chapters, the worth of literature within the historical canon was often doubted, and while it was valued within non-historical parameters, it was rarely incorporated into historical accounts. Like the romantic antiquarians, however, Gothicists were beginning to see the value of poetry as an indication of early societies' 'genius' or 'learning'. For Pinkerton, who believed that Genius required letters, having a literary tradition was important to establishing the intellectual and artistic superiority of a Gothic race.[92] Irvine corroborated this Gothicism with a sense of classical inheritance in *The Lives of the Scottish Poets*, where he not only repeated Pinkerton's arguments but relied heavily on Latin poetry produced within later medieval Scotland as evidence. Irvine attested, for example, that the first Scottish author was the twelfth-century prior of Saint Victor, Richard, who lived and wrote in Paris.[93] By completely disassociating Scottish literary output with the languages and locality of Scotland, he further attributed the cultural genesis of the Scottish people not with the Celts but with continental Europe, be it through the Germanic Goths or the Romance cultures.

Furthermore, the lines between the literary and the historical were as uncertain within the Gothic school as they were with the romantic antiquarians. Dalrymple admitted that most historians had 'literary pretensions' and that most historical writers were 'compilers', which he defined as thus:

> To invention, to accuracy of composition, or to elegance in style, they can offer no claim; they are not historians, they can only prepare materials for history: they chuse [sic] out blocks from the quarry, and having, with much patience and toil, brought them above ground, they leave them to be polished and arranged by more able artists.[94]

Like romantic antiquarianism, retrieval is portrayed as a necessary literary step, even if it is not the most glamorous aspect of the process. As these 'compilers' do not interpret the works, they are not historians, although their role is vital to the historian. Also of note is the association between historians and artists. The historian 'polishes' history, most likely through a narrative apparatus, designed to portray the manners and customs of men as well as the evidence of their genius.

So while a distinct divergence occurs in the historical details of each approach, the romantics and Gothicists employed similar methods in the constructions of their respective histories. The concept of original genius muddled boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. The word 'authenticity' came to mean more than just verifiable fact; it embraced

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[92] Pinkerton, *Enquiry Regarding the History of Scotland,* p. ix. Also refer to Chapter Two of this dissertation.
[93] Irvine, *Lives of the Scottish Poets,* p. 18.
[94] Dalrymple, *Memorials and Letters,* p. 3.

verifiable sentiment and verifiable genius. History shifted from a validation of social theory to a validation of national and aesthetic theory. The agendas each sought to construct a national genealogy, but whether that pedigree was Celtic, Gothic, or Anglo, the writers were engaged in the same process.

Transitioning into Genre

One primary theme of this dissertation so far has been the discussion of generic formulas and the overlap between historical fiction and literary non-fiction. The uncertain boundaries of genre—and the imprecise language used to clarify history from romance—disoriented historiography and obscured historical literature of the later eighteenth century. *The Poems of Ossian,* as an antiquarian icon and the villain of 'empirical history', became embroiled within debates of historical authority, authenticity, and structure.

As has been demonstrated thus far in this dissertation, *The Poems of Ossian* became a widespread literary phenomenon, which in part helped disseminate its message of Gaelic genius and noble savagery, but it was a text that did not resolve the place of the Scottish nation, which was still very much in question. *The Poems of Ossian* sought to grapple with the changing tides of history. The lonesome bard, the last of his kind, ponders the past in a nostalgic veneer as he recounts the loss of his ancestry, through the death of Fingal, and the doom of his future, through the death of Oscar. In many ways, *The Poems of Ossian* were never meant to resolve, but merely to exhibit the nebulous position of Scottishness within the diminishing frame of its own history.[95]

What changed was the widespread adoption of *The Poems of Ossian* as an antiquarian text. Both its acceptance and rejection influenced the writing of history to the point where it remained a ubiquitous presence in historical writing up through Sir Walter Scott's career. As demonstrated thus far, *The Poems of Ossian* defied stadialist ideas and influenced a change in the perception of authentic history. Its impact on genre is clearly seen through the adoption of romantic themes in historical dissertations. But for all of these debates, nothing remains clear, and the historical genre remained unfixed and amorphous. History now freely intermixed literary, antiquarian, epistemological, and philosophical elements. It sought to find authentic truth through aesthetic and spirit, not just through causality and theory. The abstract and undefined status of genius meant that history could be interpreted through a wide variety of lenses with startling diversity between accounts.

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[95] Porter, 'Bring me the Head of Macpherson', p. 357.

These debates would be, in some part, resolved by the definitive divorce between history and romance. Scott's novel, *Waverley*, is traditionally acknowledged as the foundational novel of the historical fiction genre. By the time that Scott wrote *Waverley*, there had been fifty years of concerted debate around the causal authorities and theoretical foundations of history.[96] Scott did not out to construct a historical narrative but to use historical narratives as a framework for his story. In this way, *Waverley* can be seen as resolving what *The Poems of Ossian* posited, the answer to a fifty-year-old question of literary and historical value within written works, particularly in the ways that these written works pertained to the national imagination.

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[96] Allan, *Virtue, Learning, and The Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 217.

Chapter Four: From Imitation to Authorship—the Evolution of Sir Walter Scott

In a letter to Anna Seward in 1806, Sir Walter Scott, still basking in the success of 'Lay of the Last Minstrel', indicated his debt to *The Poems of Ossian*: 'If I have been at all successful in the paths of literary pursuit I am sure I owe much of that success to the book with which [Thomas Blacklock] supplied me and his own instructions. Ossian and Spencer were two books which the good old bard put into my hands and which I devoured rather than perused.'[1] Scott's relationship with *The Poems of Ossian* is more complicated, however, than a mere literary influence. In the letter, Scott acknowledged the skill of Macpherson as well as the tediousness of his poetry; he recognised the presence of an Irish Ossianic tradition but believed Macpherson had penned his own Scottish version; he praised the soul of Celtic genius even as he scrutinised its Fingalian heritage. Finally, he finished his enquiry with this note: 'I have had for some time thoughts of writing a Highland poem, somewhat in the style of the Lay; giving as far as I can a real picture of what that enthusiastic race actually were before the destruction of their patriarchal government.'[2] Although Scott had experience in collecting and compiling oral verse, he also had a desire to portray and regenerate history through his own imitations of these verses. Unlike others who had composed imitations before him (and had attempted to frame them as truth), Sir Walter Scott was credited not as an editor or compiler of these works but as the author; he did not participate in retrieval but in invention, creation, and imagination.

Parallels between Scott and Macpherson are hard to avoid. In many ways, as Ian Duncan has argued, Scott succeeded where Macpherson failed in creating a historical experience that encapsulates on the nation without relying on the pretence of antiquity or authenticity.[3] Scott, as the admitted author, did not frame his works as a matter of truth but as an engagement of storytelling and fiction. There are some notable differences between *The Poems of Ossian* and *Waverley*. *The Poems of Ossian* recall a distant and epic age while *Waverley* remains close to the writer's present. *The Poems of Ossian*'s convoluted and chaotic prose-poetry differ from *Waverley*'s structured chapters. Yet there is a long trajectory between the two, and the later story works to answer the questions and resolve

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[1] Herbert Grierson, ed. *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott (*London: Constable, 1932-37*),* Vol 1. P. 319
[2] Ibid, p. 324.
[3] Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 49

the tensions proposed by the first. This affects the reception of the text and thus a shift in the genre.

This chapter will examine the generic development of Scott's style between his earlier poetry and anthologies towards the publication of *Waverley*. In doing so, it will demonstrate how Scott created a spiritual successor for *The Poems of Ossian* as a historical basis for the Scottish nation and why Scott's efforts succeeded where Macpherson's failed. It will examine Scott's authorship and narrative authority in relation to the historical basis in which his characters act. This chapter is not meant to be an exhaustive study of the *Waverley* novels but rather a brief, edifying overview of the ways in which the Ossianic controversy were resolved through the foundation of the Historical Novel.

The First Historical Novel?

In *Scott-Land: the Man Who Invented a Nation*, Stuart Kelly asserts that Scott's works were revolutionary because 'Scott was not a historical novelist so much as he was a novelist with a theory of history.'[4] Such a statement is not only common in regards to Scott but often left unexplained. This quote, along with Kelly's bold subtitle, endorses the mythologisation of Scott and his lauded position within Scottish culture at large. Scott is unique. Scott is revolutionary. Scott is Scotland.

Yet Scott's place within the canon is often taken for granted. He is undoubtedly a preeminent author, yet no one is quite sure where to put him. Georg Lukacs famously attributed the genesis of the historical novel to Scott, and since then, he has been generally accepted as its originator.[5] That said, those who study Scott do not find this to be so simple. The absence of his poetry from the Romantic canon has caught the attention of Fiona Robertson, Alison Lumsden, and Ainsley McIntosh.[6] Robertson noted that Scott often lingers at the fringes of the Romantic canon, included when convenient but otherwise neglected as a 'natural' and not 'literary' writer.[7] Some believed that Scott did not belong within Romantic literature at all. Lukacs argued that Scott was not a romantic because he was not 'a glorifier or elegist of past ages.'[8] It must be remembered, however, that Scott's work did not exist within a vacuum, and romance or not, his early novels owe a clear debt

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[4] Stuart Kelly, *Scott-Land: The Man Who Invented a Nation* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2010), p. 108.

[5] Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel,* trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell, (London: Merlin Press, 1962), p. 19.

[6] Alison Lumsden and Ainsley McIntosh, 'The Narrative Poems, In *The Edinburgh Companion*, p. 35.

[7] Fiona Robertson, *Legitimate Fictions: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 3.

[8] Lukacs, *The Historical Novel*, p. 34, 54-55.

to the national tales that preceded *Waverley*, including Jane Porter's *The Scottish Chiefs* and Christian Isobel Johnstone's *Clan-Albin*.[9]

It does not diminish Scott's place within the canon to acknowledge these works as vital predecessors to Scott's historical novel. Ina Ferris believes the masculinity of *Waverley* may have distracted attention from the supposedly-feminine tales that characterised previous romantic novels, among them *Clan-Albin* and *The Scottish Chiefs*.[10] In a later essay, Ferris argues that while *Waverley* was the first true Scottish ethnography, *Clan-Albin*, a more feminised Highland tale, had the same vital process of self-translation as *Waverley*.[11] Fiona Price has comfortably fit *The Scottish Chiefs* into the same mould that Lukacs cast for Waverley, although Price admits that where *Waverley* captured the concept of change in his novel, Porter emphasised continuity.[12] There were, of course, a number of non-Scottish works to which Scott was indebted, including Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*, which Scott acknowledged at the end of *Waverley*.[13] It is not uncommon to see Scott's novels described as a combination of earlier works and genres. Jerome de Groot identifies *Waverley* as a hybrid, and Richard Maxwell calls Scott a 'great synthesiser.'[14] An amalgam of genre and authority was crafted from Scott's predecessors, a necessary step towards the foundation of a new genre.

As discussed in the previous chapters, earlier trends in fiction had constructed a fictionalised role of retrieval for authors. The concept of the author as a discoverer of mouldering transcripts locked away in a desolate ruin provided a framework of authenticity that grounded the sometimes-outlandish sequence of events with an air of realism. The authorial framework of *Waverley* diverged significantly from this trend. Scott did assume a thinly-veiled persona of anonymity with his novels, but it was widely assumed that he was indeed the author of these works.[15] Furthermore, despite that anonymity, the 'Author of the Waverley Novels', although he eschewed his name on the cover, took full ownership over

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[9] Peter Garside, 'Popular Fiction and National Tale: Hidden Origins of Scott's Waverley', *Nineteenth-Century Literature,* 46.1 (1991), pp. 30-53 (pp. 36-45).

[10] Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 242.

[11] Ina Ferris, "Translation from the Borders: Encounter and Recalcitrance in *Waverley* and *Clan Albin*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction,* 9.2 (1997), pp. 203-22 (p. 209).

[12] Fiona Price, 'Resisting "the Spirit of Innovation": The Other Historical Novel and Jane Porter', *The Modern Language Review,* 101.3 (2006), pp. 638-51 (p. 640). See also Graeme Morton, 'The Social Memory of Jane Porter and her Scottish Chiefs', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 91.2 (2012), pp. 311-335

[13] Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley*, ed. by Susan Kubica Howard (London: Broadview, 2010), p. 451.

[14] Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 17; Richard Maxwell, 'The Historical Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*, ed. Richard Maxwell and Katie Trumpener, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 65-88, (p. 75).

[15] Robertson, *Legitimate Histories*, p. 123.

the works within, choosing not to employ a framework of recovery, discovery, or memoir but rather one of authorial presence stashed within the prefaces and conclusions that bookend the narrative.[16]

Before *Waverley* and its generic framework is discussed, Scott's early poetry should be examined. *Waverley* was not Scott's first foray into the exploration of authorship. His *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* would ostensibly follow the same curation of ancient poetry as other contemporary anthologies, were it not for it tripartite structure. Volume one contained a range of ballads collected from oral tradition; within the second volume, part two was devoted to Romantic Ballads, with a third part called 'Imitations'. The contrast of the constructed imitations as opposed to the collected originals indicates Scott's conscious and admitted myth-building through his own ballads.

Scott placed himself within the tradition, both as curator and as participant. He contributed to the nation-building history of Scotland willingly. Kenneth McNeil argues that 'while Scott exposed the excesses of antiquarian discourse in his fiction, he clearly valued the ballad form as an expression of a more traditional and localised world view, an alternative mode of recalling the past folk memory, in contrast to the historical/antiquarian mode.'[17] So as Scott rejected the antiquarian epistemological debates that jumpstarted in the wake of *The Poems of Ossian*, he adopted some of the key characteristics of Ossian the bard. The importance of a national history, as encoded within the literature of the nation, is then a fluid tradition that requires renewal and re-adaptation. The 'Lay of the Last Minstrel' had also begun life as an imitation but developed into a more modern poem, influenced by the likes of Coleridge and Wordsworth.[18] The development of Retrieval (as seen in Parts 1 and 2 of *Minstrelsy*) towards Imitation (as developed in Part 3) and finally towards modern reinterpretation (as realised through the 'Lay of the Last Minstrel' and 'Marmion') show a concerted and rapid evolution of genre within Scott's own career.

'Lay of the Last Minstrel' is a particularly compelling example because of its parallels to *The Poems of Ossian*. The pretext of an oral tradition colours both poems, as does the terminal state of the oral tradition. Both Ossian and the Minstrel are the last of their race, that race being a class of oral poets who were entrusted with the recitation and regeneration of history through verse. The age of the poets is similar. Ossian, the 'aged

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[16] Ibid., pp. 117-120.
[17] Kenneth McNeill, 'Borders and Ballads', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Sir Walter Scott*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 22-24, (p.24).
[18] Lumsden and McIntosh, 'The Narrative Poems, In *The Edinburgh Companion*, pp. 37-8.

hero' is described walking with a staff, and 'his grey hair glitters in the beam'.[19] Similarly, the Minstrel was 'infirm and old; his wither'd cheek and tresses, grey/Seem'd to have known a better day.'[20] The age of the bard emphasises the decaying state of the oral tradition which both narrators embody. In this way, orality within a literary medium had almost become an archetype itself, in the same sense as the bard had.

The preface to the 'The Last Minstrel' also demonstrates a clear link to *The Poems of Ossian*. The preface to the first edition describes the Minstrel in these terms:

> The poem was put into the mouth of an ancient Minstrel, the last of his race, who as he is supposed to have survived the Revolution, might have caught somewhat of the refinement of Modern Poetry, without losing the simplicity of his original model.[21]

Within this sentence, he associates the Minstrel with two distinctive traits often bandied in relation to *The Poems of Ossian*. The first is the concept of the 'last of his race'; the second is the textual interplay between the modern and ancient. Like Ossian, the Minstrel is the last conservator of a history that lives through his performance, and, like Ossian, the Minstrel is situated at a transitory episode in time, wherein his oral histories stand at the precipice of extinction.

Scott was also a prolific contributor to the periodical press at this time, and there are indications that *The Poems of Ossian* remained on his mind. The same year that Scott had published 'The Last Minstrel', he also reviewed the *Report of the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland* for the *Edinburgh Review,* wherein he praises Macpherson's efforts, not in translating *The Poems of Ossian* but in creating an aesthetic work with cultural and historical value to the nation of Scotland.[22] Scott himself did not believe in the authenticity of *The Poems of Ossian*. To him, Macpherson's worth was greater as a writer than as a translator, and Scott saw no reason for Macpherson or his allies to conceal Macpherson's talent behind the veneer of antiquity. McNeil believes that this demonstrates Scott's belief that 'the nation's literary legacy must be judged not on its antiquity but on its aesthetic merits.'[23] Scott had a famous interest in the historical, and he himself compiled anthologies of ancient poetry as well as a few histories himself. Yet his concept of the utility of history is grounded in his conception of generic archetypes.

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[19] Macpherson, 'Calthon and Colmal: A Poem', in *The Poems of Ossian*, p. 170.
[20] Scott, 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel', in *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott Bart,* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1869), p. 7.
[21] Scott, 'Lay of the Last Minstrel: Preface to the First Edition', *Poetical Works*, p. 1.
[22] Scott, 'The Report of the Highland Society and Laing's Edition of *The Poems of Ossian'*, pp. 429-62.
[23] McNeil, 'Borders and Ballads', p. 24.

The aesthetic merits Scott sought to preserve are found in his allusions and incorporations of other texts within his own work. This is one thing that Scott has in common with Macpherson: they shared an interest in establishing and preserving a long literary canon within which Scotland has a place alongside more traditional literary forebears. Just as Macpherson fought to insert *The Poems of Ossian* into a renewed European canon by associating it with Homer and Pope, Scott consciously mediated his own place within the literary tradition. *Waverley* alone cites and refers to authors as diverse as Homer, Francisco de Ubeda, Italian Romance writers Matteo Boiardo and Ludovico Ariosoto, Shakespeare, and Robert Burns. *The Poems of Ossian* are referred to a handful of times as well. While Scott rejected the labels attached to early novels, he was aware of the elements in his own work that derived from them. Intertextuality of this sort is not unique on its own, but considering the extent to which both *The Poems of Ossian* and *Waverley* perform it, it is notable that both situated themselves within a wider tradition, even as they were innovating and regenerating that very tradition.

Through the inclusion of external texts and allusions towards others, Scott engendered a literary tradition to which his own works belong. That tradition then is not stagnant but reinvigorated. *The Poems of Ossian*, while re-evaluating that tradition, did not do the same. Perhaps it is because, as Bakhtin once postulated, the epic was already perceived as a genre that was not only fully-realised but antiquated, whereas the novel is a new genre that, far from established, is still a newer and still evolving genre.[24] So where Macpherson's epic, somewhat appropriately considering its subject matter, belonged to a genre that was quickly disappearing from modern literary form, Scott embraced a new if conflicted medium to preserve and propagate the changing tradition.

Waverley and the Building of Genre

The novel is a form that eludes classification. Its wide parameters include a range of manifestations.[25] Scott himself engaged in the debate of novel versus romance, debating Samuel Johnson's definitions and establishing his own. Where Johnson thought romance was 'a military fable of the middle ages; a tale of wild adventures in love and chivalry', Scott thought it was 'a fictitious narrative in prose or verse; the interest of which turns upon marvellous and uncommon incidents.' Where Johnson thought a novel was 'a smooth tale generally of love', Scott believed it 'a fictitious narrative, differing from the Romance,

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[24] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* p. 14.
[25] Prabhakara Jha, 'Lukacs or Bakhtin? Some Preliminary Considerations toward a Sociology of the Novel', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18.30 (1983), p. 35-44.

because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events, and the modern state of society.'[26] Yet the question of novel versus romance is one clearly grappled with in *Waverley*, a text that uses its narrative platform to discuss genre and its multiplicity of forms.

Although lauded as the foundational text of the historical novel genre, *Waverley* itself intermixes genres, and it contains literary allusions and excerpts to remind the reader of the limitations and potential of genre. Connections are drawn between major characters and folks heroes, such as Robin Hood, Adam o' Gordon, Johnathan Wild, and Ossian himself.[27] Balladry and bardic verse appear intermixed with the prose. Scott demonstrates these observations about history, genre, and their roles in relation to one another in both direct and indirect ways.

Perhaps the bluntest generic examination in the novel, the first chapter of *Waverley* begins with a rumination on genre. When Scott defended the choice of his 'title', he explored the associations and implications of the book's placement within literary culture at large. His dismissal of ancient English names for a name that is, at once, both 'euphonic' and 'virgin' stands as Scott's first in a series of generic dismissals. The name Waverley is free from the historical attachments that defined other typically Gothic choices; the examples Scott provides range from the Anglo-Saxon ('Howard, Mordaunt, Mortimer, or Stanley') to Norman ('Belmour, Belville, Belfield, and Belgrave'), but he chooses Waverley instead, with careful deliberation on the fact that it is an invented name, an invented family, and an invented history. Scottish names, too, are chosen as to be un-associated with any known Scottish dignitaries.[28] This invention allows Scott's heroes to enter the historical stage with no obligation to the faithfulness of historical figures.

Waverley dispenses with the archetypical motif of retrieval that sequestered stories as being discovered, typically in an abject ruin, library, or church. By introducing his story with a generic study, Scott provoked readers' assumptions about the text:

> Had I, for example, announced in my frontispiece, "Waverley, a Tale of Other Days", must not every novel-reader have anticipated a castle scarce less than that of Udolpho, of which the eastern wing had long been uninhabited, and the keys either lost, or consigned to the care of some aged butler or housekeeper, whose trembling steps, about the middle of the second volume, were doomed to guide the hero, or

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[26] Scott, 'Essay on Romance', in *The Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott, Bart: Essays on chivalry, romance, and the drama,* (France: R. Cadell, 1834), pp. 129-216 (p. 129).
[27] Scott, *Waverley*, pp. 149; 140; 191.
[28] Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism,* p. 192.

heroine, to the ruinous precincts?...Again, had my title borne, "Waverley: a Romance from the German," what head so obtuse as not to image forth a profligate abbot, an oppressive duke, a secret and mysterious association of Rosicrucian's and Illuminati, with all their properties of black cowls, caverns, daggers, electrical machines, trap-doors, and dark lanterns? Or if I had rather chosen to call my work a 'Sentimental Tale,' would it not have been a sufficient presage of a heroine with a profusion of auburn hair, and a harp, the soft solace of her solitary hours…Or again, if my Waverley had been entitled "A Tale of the Times," wouldst thou not, gentle reader, have demanded from me a dashing sketch of the fashionable world, a few anecdotes of private scandal thinly veiled, and if lusciously painted, so much the better?[29]

Scott defined his text primarily by denying it entry into any of these categories, choosing a unique subtitle: 'Tis Sixty Years Since'. Unlike many Gothic romances set in obscured pasts, the events of *Waverley* occur around the failed Jacobite Rebellion of the '45. His purpose in doing so seems to be in refusing it categorisation within the generic conventions of the time while simultaneously acknowledging the similarities his novel has with other emergent genres.

The first of his novels, *Waverley* was not as distant from Scott's own time as some of his later works would be. The parameters of Scott's fiction, sixty years before the date of publication, allows the novel to explore 'more a description of men than manners.'[30] The difference is the temporal distance between the reader and the narrative. Scott believed that 'a tale of Manners, to be interesting, must either refer to antiquity so great as to have become venerable, or it must bear a vivid reflection of those scenes which are passing daily before our eyes, and are interesting from their novelty.'[31] Scott's temporal framework was not so distant that it has escaped living memory, but it was still removed from society in 1814, when consequences of the '45 were still reverberating through Scotland.[32]

It allowed the historical to exist within a fictional plane, adapting 'authentic' historical events as a mould for his heroes. Lukacs, somewhat idealistically, proclaimed Scott's definition of the historically authentic as 'the quality of the inner life, the morality, heroism, capacity for sacrifice, steadfastness, etc. peculiar to a given age.'[33] It is an authenticity of feeling that is produced by the events of that age, which influenced and shaped their characters rather than provide a mere backdrop against which the characters

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[29] Scott,' *Waverley,* pp. 57-8.
[30] Scott, *Waverley*, p. 58
[31] Scott, *Waverley*, p. 58-9.
[32] An interesting look into the reception of *Waverley* as a historical novel, Ferris discusses some of the early reviews of *Waverley*, particularly those of John Wilson Croker, who would have preferred Scott to have written a pure history instead of a novel. See *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, p. 138.
[33] Lukacs, *The Historical Novel,* p. 50.

play.[34] The authenticity of those events, whether it is authentic in the scope of events or authentic in the expression of an artistic genius, is rendered irrelevant.

Yet Lukacs' sometimes imprecise language puts him in danger of muddling the distinction between the romantics' highly personalised concepts of genius and Scott's own Tory views of literary tradition and cultural inheritance.[35] The dialogic process of *Waverley* helps it absorb and refine elements borrowed from other genres, even as it constructs a new apparatus for its own brand of historical craft. It also contributed to the synthesis of voices, languages, genres, and politics, which are what Bakhtin would call 'social heteroglossia'.[36] This heteroglossia, as it pertains to history, created a dynamic of historical cause and effect that influences and interacts with the heroes of the novel. *Waverley* presents a panorama of political thought and disagreement around a central historical event: the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745.

History, Culture, and Translation

Chapters Two and Three discussed the popular historical theories and debates of the long eighteenth century. Scott was no stranger to these articles. As far as authentic history went, Scott reserved scepticism for antiquarian accounts and shared the typical lament at the state of early Scottish manuscripts. In a letter to Reverend R. Polwhele in 1814, Scott claimed that '[Dalrymple,] Lord Hailes was the first who introduced accuracy into Scottish history. All who precede him may be considered as absolutely legendary.'[37] Scott had plans to write his own history of Scotland from as early as 1814, and although this first effort would never manifest, he did eventually publish *Tales of a Grandfather* in 1828.[38] In the meantime, Scott produced a number of historical novels.

With its emphasis on the changing landscape of Scotland in the midst of Union and Rebellion, *Waverley* succeeds in bringing the English core to the Scottish periphery. The conduct of an English gentleman through the Scottish countryside, embroiling himself in an alien Gaelic culture and participating in the Jacobite cause, refocuses post-Union anxieties into a narrative easily accessible to the Anglo-reader.[39] Kenneth McNeil points to

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[34] See also de Groot, *The Historical Novel*, p. 24.
[35] Matt Salyer, '"Nae mortal man should be entrusted wi' sic an ingine": *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and the Tory Problem of Romantic Genius', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 46.1 (2013), pp. 92-115 (p. 93).
[36] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* p. 263.
[37] Grierson, ed. *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott,* Vol 3, p. 425.
[38] Catherine Jone's coverage of this in "History and Historiography', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Sir Walter Scott*, pp. 59-69.
[39] Ferris, *Translation from the Borders,* p. 214.

the frequent crossing of the Highland/Lowland boundary in Scottish narratives: within these 'overlapping spaces', the Lowlander and Highlander 'pacify and improve the native.'[40] The border-zone in *Waverley* is 'upon the braes', which defined not just a physical space or the ethnic boundaries between coexisting peoples but a social, economic, and political demarcation as well. Joseph Valente notes that the 'feudal estate, Tully-Veolan balances the collectivist ethos associated with the tribalism of the clans against the individualism that has become predominant to the south.'[41] Furthermore, associations were drawn politically as Edward crosses the border north.

Edward's journey north gives him access to aspects of Scotland he would otherwise not encounter, but more than a travel narrative, the events of the Jacobite Rebellion linger in the foreground. This event (or this matrix of events) shapes the path and decisions of Edward Waverley, and when Edward sympathises with the Jacobitism of Fergus MacIvor Vich Ian Vohr, he finds himself manoeuvring multiple social and political discourses, each encoded within a specific ethnic schema, the boundaries of which are marked by unmitigated physical, linguistic, and historical tensions. The alienation of Edward, as he passes through successive zones of cultural variance from the normative Anglo structure of his youth, requires the other characters within the book to translate the practices, customs, and manners of Scotland, both within its English-speaking quadrants and its Gaelic.[42] Edward begins within his normative English landscape, which provides a comfortable if boring existence for the young Edward, who acquires a taste for romance and imagination.[43] By joining the military, Edward is granted the opportunity to travel north to Scotland. In Perthshire he falls under the hospitality of the Baron Bradwardine at Tully-Veolan. Edward's first impression of the village is that 'the houses seemed miserable in the extreme, especially to an eye accustomed to the smiling neatness of English cottages.'[44] Almost immediately, an economic portrait is drawn in contrast between the English and Scottish countryside. Edward spends several weeks at Tully-Veolan, during which he is slowly acquainted with the Highland clan demanding blackmail from the baron.

The introduction of the Highlands, as well as the overlapping space between the Baron's Anglo-estate and the exotic society of the Highlanders, show a gradual

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[40] Kenneth McNeil, *Scotland, Britain, Empire: Writing the Highlands, 1760-1860,* (Columbus: University of Ohio Press, 2007), p. 6.
[41] Joseph Valente, 'Upon the Braes: History and Hermeneutics in *Waverley', Studies in Romanticism,* 25.2 (1986), pp. 251-76, (p. 261).
[42] Ferris, 'Translation from the Borders,' pp. 213-4.
[43] Scott, *Waverley*, pp. 66-84.
[44] Scott, *Waverley*, p. 93.

accommodation on behalf of Edward. An interesting interaction occurs between Rose and Edward while Vich Iain Vohr is introduced:

> 'And did you ever see this Mr. MacIvor [...]"
>
> `No, that is not his name; and he would consider master as a sort of affront, only that you are an Englishman, and know no better. But the Lowlanders call him, like other gentlemen, by the name of his estate, Glennaquoich; and the Highlanders call him Vich Ian Vohr, that is, the son of John the Great; and we upon the braes here call him by both names indifferently.'
>
> 'I am afraid that I shall never bring my English tongue to call him by either one or the other.'[45]

This dialogue establishes the relative cultural positions of the various voices through the process of naming. Edward, at this early stage, believes that he will retain his English custom and call Fergus by his English name—which Rose warns would be an insult. Lowlanders have a separate land-based custom, and the Highlanders have a patronymic. What is most curious is Rose's place as a mediator between Highland and Lowland. She engages with both names and therefore both cultures equally, making her the ideal translator for Edward.[46]

The final cultural boundary, of course, is that of the Highland plane, in which Edward is immersed. The Highland landscape is most alien because it involves not just a change of scenery or an adjustment to poverty but a wholescale introduction to the hierarchies, language, and practices of Gaelic culture. His translator no longer is the placid, intermediary Rose but rather the rebellious Highlanders themselves. Evan Dhu, Fergus, and Flora all serve the capacity of translator in some way. Eventually, Fergus announces that Edward has lost (in his eyes) his military title of Captain, in effect losing his own name as he abandons the cockade of the British military and adopts the white cockade of the House of Stuart.[47] Despite his initial scepticism, Edward becomes entrenched within Highland society.

Such a transition is not without its consequences for Edward. Where in the first part of the novel, he is able to take leave from the military and explore the cultural institutions of Scotland freely, current events catch up with him. The actions of individual

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[45] Scott, *Waverley*, p. 141.

[46] This would later become important after the rejection of the staunchly Highland Flora and the eventual marriage between Rose and Edward. Edward learns not to wholly embrace the romantic but problematic Highland culture but rather to integrate particular elements of it, as Rose had.

[47] Scott, *Waverley*, p. 206.

characters—both on and off stage—results in Edward confronting the consequences of his actions and the realisation of his place within the trans-British conflict. It stops being a romantic picture of a sublime race struggling for pride and becomes a real and dangerous situation. It is, as Scott himself described it, a tale of the actions of men, who operate within specific cultural and historical schema. For instance, Evan Dhu, bound by the dictates of kinship and patriarchy which define his culture, attempts to trade his life for Fergus', only to be told that such a custom is incompatible with the English judicial process.[48] Yet rather than accept the pity of the judge, Evan Dhu willingly gives himself to be executed alongside his chief. Fergus indicates that Flora would have been willing to do the same.[49] Meanwhile, Edward's servant Alick bemoans the loss of Evan, a man whose only mistake, according to Alick, was to be born a Highlander.[50] This scene demonstrates the variance of cultural perspective that each of the commentators have on the same event.

That said, Edward's liminal place between cultures and borders causes him disorientation and provides significant doubt as he proceeds through the war. When Humphrey dies, Edward realises, for the first time, the consequences of his dalliance in Scotland: 'I shunned to bear my own share of the burden, and wandered from the duties I had undertaken, leaving alike those whom it was my business to protect, and my own reputation to suffer under the artifices of villainy.'[51] While Edward is a romantic—and while he spends a great deal of his time romanticising his surroundings—, his decisions are in small part affected by those circumstances outside of his control. The landscape of Scotland, as presented in *Waverley*, is in turmoil: literally, because of the rebellion, but also figuratively, at a cultural level, as Edward, who is manoeuvring the alien Gaelic landscape learns through his cultural education.

Scott's politics are ever present in the background of his literature. Scott's confidence in the union as well as his strong convictions against the Jacobites are most apparent in the last chapters of *Waverley*, in which he bookends his first chapter on genre with a similar scrutiny of the Scottish nation. Scott here reaffirms the thematic turmoil of historical change:

> There is no European nation, which, within the course of half a century, or little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland. The effects of the insurrection of 1745—the destruction of the patriarchal power of the

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[48] Scott, *Waverley*, pp. 428-9.
[49] Scott, *Waverley*, p. 435.
[50] Scott, *Waverley*, p. 437.
[51] Scott, Waverley, p. 315.

> Highland chiefs, -- the abolition of the heritable jurisdictions of the Lowland
> nobility and barons,--the total eradication of the Jacobite party, which, averse to
> intermingle with the English, or adopt their customs, long continued to pride
> themselves upon maintaining ancient Scottish manners and customs,--commenced
> this innovation.[52]

Scott here established the modernisation of Scotland as arising from a great period of change, in which many 'ancient' Scottish traditions were annihilated. Scott was split between a desire to preserve these customs (a goal which he defines as his purpose for writing *Waverley*) and an appreciation for the progress of the previous century. Yet Scott was ultimately a custodian of these cultural treasures. While others chose to retrieve, he wrote 'For the purpose of preserving some idea of the ancient manners of which I have witnessed the almost total extinction, I have embodied in imaginary scenes and ascribed to fictitious characters a part of the incidents which I then received from those were actors in them.'[53] Scott saw the potential of a fictional medium in securing the truth. He did not conceal that it was a fictional work; rather, he proudly explained his motives to produce a work that many have agreed adequately portrays the spirit of the age.

Waverley and *The Poems of Ossian*

Now that a brief overview of *Waverley*'s historical and generic conventions have been explored, this chapter must return to the key question: in what ways did *Waverley* resolve the tensions proposed by *The Poems of Ossian*? There are some interesting comparisons that can be drawn here between the utility of history in *The Poems of Ossian* and in *Waverley*. Both are texts that clearly value a historical lineage which is invested in the literary output of the country. Initially, Macpherson sought to preserve the customs of his Gaelic heritage by illustrating the disorientation and decline of Gaelic orality in the wake of post-Jacobite proscriptions. The loss of the oral culture, as perceived through the custodians meant to preserve it, revealed the anxieties of a peripheral Scottish culture. These anxieties do not dissipate, but once again, there is no indication that they are meant to.[54] *Waverley*, on the other hand, seeks to situate the whole of the Scottish nation—Highland and Lowland—within a comfortable Union. Scott wishes to preserve these customs but not at the cost of progress. Therefore, *Waverley* must resolve. The Hero must understand the consequences of his actions; the blinds must be lifted from his eyes so he

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[52] Scott, *Waverley*, p. 450.
[53] Scott, *Waverley*, pp. 450-1.
[54] Porter, 'Bring me the Head of Macpherson', p. 357.

understands that pure romance is not authentic. There are, however, similarities in the themes and techniques that both texts use and differences in the way that they use them.

The self-translation that occurs in *Waverley* is a clear distinction from *The Poems of Ossian*. Macpherson was aware of the foreign nature of the stories he was introducing into the wider British consciousness. As demonstrated in Chapter One, Macpherson tried to accommodate his reader's ignorance of Gaelic culture through a bevy of footnotes and discursive annotations. That said, if these expository details are ignored and the narrative is taken alone (as would have happened with the initial publication of *Fragments*), Fingal and his cohort provide no interpretation of their own culture to the uninformed reader. Readers are tossed into an unfamiliar landscape, with elements that may or may not be taken as subversive, with a host of exotic names and customs.[55] In *Waverley*, the apparatus of an English hero, whose language and manners would have appealed to a wider British audience, allows Scott to continuously explain the cultural, political, economic, and social landscape to his readers through the unknowing soldier.[56] There is a bit of social commentary as well within these characteristics. The romantic qualities of Edward's character would have provided a topical lens for contemporaneous literary trends through commentary on the quixotic but futile ideals of Edward as he becomes swept up in the rebellion.

History, as a cultural institution, is important in both texts, but there is a strong difference in the approach to history. History in *The Poems of Ossian* is memory, which exists in the oral tradition and has the power to resurrect the past through ghosts. In *Waverley*—and in the subsequent genre of historical novels—history is not memory so much as it is a record of men's 'habits, manners, and feelings' within a different temporal context.[57] In *The Poems of Ossian*, history is a narrative of past glory that reflects present decline. In *Waverley*, present turmoil provides the narrative. So, in some ways, it can be said that while *The Poems of Ossian* are historicist, *Waverley* is historical.

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[55] See again Stafford's *The Sublime Savage*, pp. 96-111.
[56] This innovation of 'self-translation' is typically attributed to Edgeworth who is seen as concocting the first national tale. 'Self-translation' is an element that is seen as a defining characteristic of the auto-ethnography, which may or may not have been Scott's own innovation to the genre. That said, as established earlier, because of the number of novels with similar characteristics, this is a debate that, while interesting and relevant, is better suited for a separate paper of its own. See Ferris, 'Translation from the Borders', pp. 203-22.
[57] Scott, *Waverley*, p. 451.

Conclusion

For William F. Skene, writing after the deaths of Macpherson and Scott, Ossian and his poetry was still a vital aspect of Scottish history. He argued that:

> The value of Ossian as a historical poet must stand in the highest rank, while, whether the chief part of these poems are of ancient or modern composition, there can remain little doubt that in him we possess the oldest record of the history of a very remote age.[1]

That in the nineteenth century, Skene can accept a poet operating within the role of a historian speaks to the legacy of the Ossianic debates. *The Poems of Ossian* posited the catalyst that necessitated a reconsideration of historical inheritance from the wider Scottish audience. Scott's early works provide perhaps the first cogent response to the tensions and anxieties surrounding Scottish history and historiography, but they were not the first to attempt it. Where *The Poems of Ossian* pose the uncertain future of Gaelic culture, Scott situates that future within a secure union setting. In *Waverley*, Gaelic culture may be at the brink of extinction but Scotland and its people, as a whole, the novel argues, are better served within the confines of Britain. The form of the novel is crucial to *Waverley*'s status. As Ian Duncan writes, 'the novel's special quality—its ficionality—opens rather than closes the question of its relation to historical and political contexts.'[2] The lack of necessity for accuracy allows the author to abandon the pretence of discovery and to explore, within a fictional realm, the 'authentic' (in all its various meanings). If Ossian could be the historical poet, then Scott could be the historical novelist.

The locus of Scottish cultural identity was very much in contention during this period. Competing ideologies spread Celtic romanticism (which in Scotland would emphasise Highlandism), Lowland Scotch peasant tradition (embodied by the works of Robert Burns and James Hogg among others)[3], and Anglo-Centric racial identity (including but not limited to the Gothic school).[4] One must also consider the historical theories and epistemological frameworks that fed into these ideas. An awareness of these dialectical divergences is encoded into the body of historical writing of this period. These concepts shaped and influenced the form, structure, and content of historical writing. The intertextual communication between forty-four years' worth of historical writing—both in

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[1] Skene, *The Highlanders of Scotland, their Origin, History and Antiquities*, p. 215.

[2] Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, p. 29.

[3] See Valentina Bold*, James Hogg: A Bard of Nature's Making* for an exploration of the auto-didact tradition which aggrandised a working-class sphere of poetry as fulfilling a taste for peasant poetry.

[4] Kidd, 'Teutonist Ethnology,' pp. 45-68.

its fiction and non-fiction forms—provides perspective into the slippery inquiry of human origins.

What emerges is a series of dialogues regarding historical authority (what type of artefacts count as authentic artefacts?), authenticity (how do we determine what artefacts provide the most accurate picture of the times?), and genre (how do we write a history that is authentic and authorial?). The parameters for each function varies so widely between writers that the employed devices are best explained as spectrums, which clearly protruded onto the realm of the other. Bakhtin, when he spoke of early chivalric romances, explored how 'translation, reworking, re-conceptualising, re-accenting—manifold degrees of mutual inter-orientation with alien discourse, alien intentions' were responsible for the formation and development of the European prose novel genre.[5] To apply this to historical writing, particularly in this period, is not difficult considering the blurred lines between the various mediums of historical writing. If anything, these developments in history building demonstrate how concepts of morality, law, politics, and aesthetics can be interpreted through a historical lens.[6]

Within the Enlightenment constructions of empirical morality, historical writing was particularly tricky as debate occurred over what counted as authentic history. This dissertation has shown that authenticity was a topic that energised debate far beyond *The Poems of Ossian*, and yet the reception of Macpherson's work demonstrates the ambiguities of determining authenticity. *The Poems of Ossian* were not controversial because they were accused of forgery; *The Poems of Ossian* were controversial because they threatened to expose the fragile basis on which history was determined. At the same time, it proved that the historical could exist outside of written manuscripts. It validated the role of the historian within the literary landscape, paving the way for those like Walter Scott who wished to mediate the legacy of the nation within a fictional form.

The Legacy of the Long Eighteenth-Century

The years between 1760 and 1814 encompassed significant upheaval in regards to institutional epistemologies. This dissertation has shown how stadialism, moral philosophy, textual archaeology, sublime romanticism, and primitivism competed in public narratives regarding Scotland's earliest history. In this period, these emergent genres,

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[5] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 377-8.

[6] This is not too distant, of course, from Moore's idea that *The Poems of Ossian* served to work through the failures of Gaelic Scotland by lionising its virtues. See Moore, *Enlightenment and Romance*, p. 25.

drawn from the synthesis of older forms, encourage the redrawing of disciplinary boundaries by probing the limits of authenticity and authority. In exploring this transition, it is sometimes necessary to read histories as literature and literature as historical perspective. In doing so, one sees that binary representations between schools of thought, while convenient, limit understanding.

Rather, overlapping distinctions of disciplinary boundaries coincide with one another, borrowing elements from each while nominally staying true to their respective agendas. Literary, historical, and historicist texts can be difficult to extricate in this period, but they do exist, albeit in constant flux. The primary purpose of history throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was to instruct, but as the definition of history widened, so too did the motives behind it.[7] This change led to a diverse range of Enlightenment writings, some of which refocused the study of causality towards a moralist objective. Other examples explored stadialist narratives which corralled specific achievements through linear progressive stages in order to understand and activate improvement in society. Still others fixated on the role of history in Scottish nation building, situating themselves within 'the historical age of the historical nation.'[8] Romantic antiquarians, with their *poiesis* as evidence of ancient genius, competed with Gothicists, who aligned Scottish history with English origins. Both schools, for their protests of opposing values, freely intertwined historical values with literary ones in an effort to uncover the original state of both man and nation. Perhaps most startlingly, over the course of five decades, poetry gained a prestige that allowed it to be taken as an authentic source of historical authority.

Novels of the era also contributed to the manufacture of Scottish history. The national tale, that feminised history posed within a fictional apparatus, translated the Celtic peripheries into English while dispensing with the typical modes of retrieval. The successor to the national tale was, of course, the historical novel, Scott's masculine national tale. *Waverley* established a literary historiography wherein literary authority derived not from a sense of historical precedence but from the author him (or her) self. Yet while we can conceive these categories, the boundaries touched upon one another, overlapping and informing each other, sparking dialogues that carried over the years.

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[7] Allan, *Virtue, Learning, and the Scottish Enlightenment,* p. 79.
[8] Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 58-61.

The Poems of Ossian straddled these intertextual debates. The poems incorporated bardic memory into the fabric of institutionalised history, invoking a more spiritual nostalgia that relied on controversial oral practice rather than the highly-regarded manuscripts that laid the basis for the historical authorities of the day. What emerged was a shift in the motives of historical writing. It was no longer restricted to discovering an accurate sequence of events. It also exposed the customs of men throughout time. This growing interest in the 'manners of men' may predate *The Poems of Ossian* but it was invigorated by the Ossianic debate. Macpherson's Ossian weaves a taxonomy that not only glorified the past through heroic elegies but also glorified the bard as a custodian of heroic manners. In this light, it is unsurprising that the antiquarians relied on *The Poems of Ossian* as a historical text instead of a purely literary one. That said, it was an idea that flouted the rationalist perspective of history. Scott's *Waverley* handled this by investigating the history of the 'manners of men' within that purely literary framework, albeit one that leaned on historiographical methods.

While Scott is a convenient place to cap this movement (and indeed, a convenient place to end this dissertation), one must remember that Scott's influence may have boosted this Ossianic trajectory well into the nineteenth century. Skene advocated for the authenticity of *The Poems of Ossian* throughout his career; his introduction to a nineteenth-century translation of the *Book of the Dean of Lismore* explores the historical basis for both the Irish and Scottish cycles.[9] Matthew Arnold, a protégé of the German school, utilised the femininity of the Ossianic bard as evidence of Celtic cultural infirmity.[10] Cosmo Innes pursued the subject briefly in *Sketches of Early Scotch History*.[11] J.F. Campbell and Alexander Carmichael were both encouraged by the reception of the poems to collect and preserve Highland folklore.[12] Highland newspapers would carry Ossianic translation and

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[9] William F. Skene, 'Introduction' in *The Dean of Lismore's Book*, trans. Thomas MacLauchlan (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1862), Xlvii- lxviii.

[10] Murray Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 64-65.

[11] 'You will observe I do not enter upon the much vexed question of Ossianic poetry Not that I doubt that there existed lately in the Highlands some fragments of a very ancient Celtic, bardic poetry, preserved with the necessary imperfection of oral tradition. On the contrary, I think the evidence is complete, both of its antiquity, and that its subjects and heroes were known to the fathers of our Scotch literature. But there I think we stop.' Cosmo Innes, *Sketches of Early Scotch History*, (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1860). p. 256.

[12] Donald E. Meek, 'The Sublime Gael: The Impact of Macpherson's Ossian on Literary Creativity and Cultural Perception in Gaelic Scotland', in *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*, pp. 40-66 (pp. 59, 64).

dedications throughout the nineteenth century.[13] So while the common assumption is that *The Poems of Ossian* disappeared from the Scottish consciousness after Scott, their legacy still remained a pertinent topic within both public and academic discourse.

The Poems of Ossian **and the Writing of History Today**

The Poems of Ossian provide a prime example of how a literary text can distort and enter the historical mind-set and contribute to the collective re-imagining of history. While its 'authenticity' may still be a subject of debate, its structural, stylistic, and historical influence in this period is not. As this dissertation has demonstrated, there still remains disagreement regarding the categorisation of genre in the period following *The Poems of Ossian*. The ambiguity presented in the thin boundaries between history, novel, romance, and ballad challenge such categorisation and should encourage more scholarship regarding the current conceptions of these genres. There is significant utility in these categorisations, but to limit them to binary oppositions significantly restricts our perception of the nuances of historical writing and interpretation. It also limits our own understanding of how 'authenticity' is used and interpreted.

As this dissertation has explored the concept of authenticity in the eighteenth century, it may be useful to pause here and reflect also on how authenticity is determined today. It still occurs in modern literary criticism that *The Poems of Ossian* were a forgery. Peter T. Murphy states that Macpherson offers 'an interesting example of the literary criminal, a kind of malefactor whose faults are at best vaguely defined.'[14] Howard Weinbrot calls James Macpherson 'almost certainly a fabricator, plagiarist, and scoundrel'.[15] Thomas Curley lauds Samuel Johnson as 'the arch-enemy of falsehood in the *Ossian* business,' which he stated was guilty 'not only for offending against morality but also for violating authentic history and the simple human trust that makes society possible.'[16] Curley has gone so far as to state that by examining Macpherson's impact on the Romantic Movement, these so-called revisionists are 'shifting focus away from the pejorative charge of literary lying.'[17] The language here is clear. Macpherson committed a

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[13] For a few examples of this, see 'Ossian's Address, *The Oban Times*, 7 January, 1882, p. 2;'"Ossian" and London Games', *The Inverness Advertiser*, 29 February 1883, p. 6.

[14] Peter T. Murphey, 'Fool's Gold: The Highland Treasures of Macpherson's Ossian', *ELH* 53.3 (1986), pp. 567-591 (p. 567).

[15] Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue,* p. 478.

[16] Thomas Curley, *Samuel Johnson, The Ossian Fraud, and the Celtic Revival,* p. 2.

[17] Ibid, p. 15.

crime through his deceptive transmission of Ossianic literature. The strength of their condemnation is rarely seen in contemporary academic journals, yet it is startling that it evokes such an emotive response well into the twentieth century. This concept of authenticity, so important to the practices of academia, should be subject to the same scrutiny that is exacted upon the source, not so that we can abandon the notion but so that we can further our understanding of our own perceptions.

Similarly, a disciplinary divide between historians and literary critics regarding the treatment of Enlightenment and Romance would benefit from further reflection. Historians are more likely to isolate individual Enlightenment movements due to the various movements across Europe at this time. The consequence of this compartmentalisation is its strict separation from the Romantic Movement. Where the Enlightenment is often characterised as hyper-rationalist and idealistically scientific, it was indeed a broad and complicated movement that sometimes eludes strict boundaries.[18] Meanwhile, literary disciplines tend to intermix the two. Murray Pittock and Ian Duncan have both characterised the Scottish Enlightenment as a fundamentally interdisciplinary movement, wherein the Scottish Enlightenment influenced the historicist and nation-building tendencies that ground the consciousness of Scottish Romanticism.[19] There were significant differences between Scottish Enlightenment and Scottish Romanticism, differences that perhaps underscore them as two distinct phenomena. There were significant similarities between these movements, similarities that arise, in part, to their overlapping periodicity and contemporaneous epistemological debates. Like the other restrictive binaries discussed in this dissertation , perhaps a reinvestigation into the conception of these movements is warranted, not to redefine them but to further understand the interplay between ideas and texts during the long eighteenth century.[20]

Thanks to the scholarship of the last thirty years, however, the Ossianic contribution to Scottish history is becoming more widely acknowledged. These poems laid an important foundation for both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scottish literature.

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[18] Sher's excellent breakdown of this issue within scholarship on Enlightenment can be found in the introduction to *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[19] Murray Pittock, "Introduction', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 6-8; Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, p. 46.

[20] Sir Walter Scott is perhaps the best example of this confluence of Enlightenment and Romance. *Waverley*, while it borrows stylistically from the Romantic Movement and Enlightenment, propagates Whiggish ideas of history. It participates in the historiographical nation-building of Scotland while situating it within a safe British union.

The romantic, wild beauty of the Highlands, as glorified by Ossian's verse, has fixed Scotland's reputation abroad, and to this day, it remains part of the global perspective of Scotland.[21] It should not be forgotten, however, how *The Poems of Ossian* also contributed to the writing of Scottish history. Even if the Ossianic narrative is not accepted as fact, its reception sparked a new format of inquiry into Scottish origins, both within the Highlands and Lowlands.

To end this dissertation, perhaps the most appropriate point is to turn to Ossian himself. A prescient reading can be gleaned here regarding Ossian's place within the poems, an unintentional indication of how Ossian, the bard, and *Ossian*, the poems, would haunt Scottish culture. As the 'Songs of Selma' end:

> Roll on, ye dark-brown years, for ye no joy on your course. Let the tomb open to Ossian, for his strength has failed. The sons of song are gone to rest: my voice remains, like a blast, that roars, lonely, on a sea-surrounded rock, after the winds are laid. The dark moss whistles there, and the distant mariner sees the waving trees.[22]

While Ossian is dead and his bardic line severed, his presence remains a ghostly imprint on the reanimation of Scottish culture in the post-Jacobite years. While his name may lie in obscurity, his contribution to the pageantry and ecology of Scottish culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries lives on.

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[21] While this dissertation was unable to cover the Ossianic contribution to literary tourism in detail, one should refer to Ian Brown, ed., *Literary Tourism, the Trossachs, and Walter Scott* (Glasgow: Association of Scottish Literary Studies, 2012) for an exploration of how the emerging tourism market of the late eighteenth century was influenced by *The Poems of Ossian* and the subsequent literary output of the Romantics and Sir Walter Scott.

[22] 'Song of Selma,' *The Poems of Ossian*, p. 170.

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